

The New Criterion

December 1999

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

Notes & Comments, 1

Reflections on the end of the century
by Hilton Kramer, 4

Was World War I necessary? *by Keith Windschuttle, 9*

Thomas Hardy & American poetry *by David Yezzi, 17*

Mary Warnock *by Jenny Teichman, 26*

Poems by *Robley Wilson, Harvey Shapiro*
& *Floyd Skloot, 32*

Letter from Mexico City: ¿O plomo o plata? *by Alexander Coleman, 36;*

Theater *by Mark Steyn, 41;* Art: The Renaissance in Venice *by Karen Wilkin,*

46; Exhibition notes *by Roger Kimball & Daniel Kunitz, 51;* The media

by James Bowman, 55; Verse chronicle: No mercy *by William Logan, 60*

Books: Jonathan Haslam *The vices of integrity: E. H. Carr 1892-1982 reviewed*
by David Pryce-Jones, 68; Frank McCourt *"Tis reviewed by Brooke Allen, 71;*

Fenton Bresler Napoleon III: a life reviewed by Stuart Ferguson, 74;

Notebook: At the point of extinction *by Paul Dean, 78*

Volume 18, Number 4, \$5.75



Horacio Torres

[1924–1976]

Painting

Masterpieces of Renaissance Sculpture

including Andrea del Verrocchio's
Bust of Christ

December 8 to 30

Salander-O'Reilly Galleries

20 East 79 Street New York 10021 Tel (212) 879-6606

www.salander.com Monday-Saturday 9:30 to 5:30

Milton Avery

Edge of Abstraction



Fishing Wharf, 1957. Flat black on paper, 17 x 22 inches

Through January 22, 2000

CATALOGUE AVAILABLE

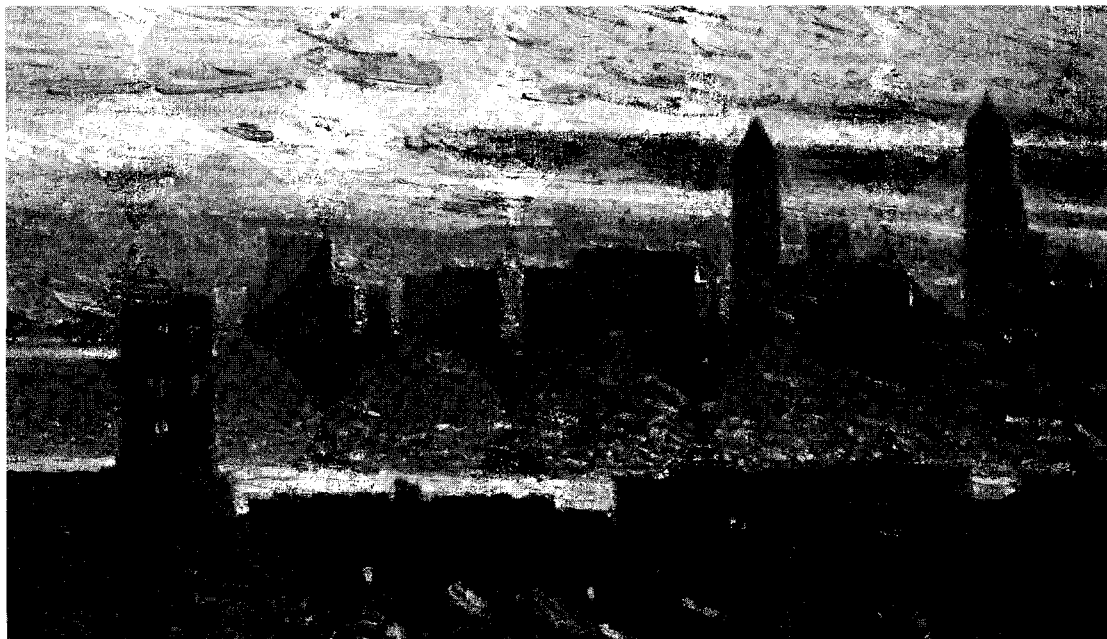
WITH ESSAY BY STEPHEN POLCARI

Knoedler & Company

— ESTABLISHED 1846 —

19 East 70 Street New York, NY 10021 Tel (212) 794-0550

CHILDE HASSAM: An American Impressionist



CHILDE HASSAM (1859–1935) *Manhattan at Sunset*, 1911, oil on linen, 19¼ × 33 inches

Childe Hassam: An American Impressionist, a major loan exhibition, includes oils, pastels, and watercolors lent by museums and private collectors throughout the country. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with 95 color plates, available for \$35.

Also available is the book *Childe Hassam—Impressionist*, with 250 illustrations and essays by Warren Adelson, Jay E. Cantor and William Gerdts, published in conjunction with the exhibition by Abbeville Press.

On view November 2 – December 15, 1999 at

Adelson Galleries, Inc.

THE MARK HOTEL 25 EAST 77TH STREET NEW YORK, NY 10021 TEL (212) 439-6800
FAX (212) 439-6870 WWW.ADELSONGALLERIES.COM INFO@ADELSONGALLERIES.COM

On view January 11 – February 5, 2000 at

Meredith Long & Company

2323 SAN FELIPE HOUSTON, TX 77019 TEL (713) 523-6671 FAX (713) 523-2355
WWW.MEREDITHLONGGALLERY.COM INFO@MEREDITHLONGGALLERY.COM

The New Criterion *December 1999*

Editor & Publisher *Hilton Kramer*

Managing Editor *Roger Kimball*

Poetry Editor *Robert Richman*

Associate Editor *Robert Messenger*

Assistant to the Editors *Sara E. Lussier*

Technical Associate *Maxwell Watman*

Editorial Intern *Aaron Hawn*

Publisher 1982–1994 *Samuel Lipman*

Contributors to this issue

Brooke Allen reviews books regularly for *The New Criterion*.

James Bowman is the American editor of the London *Times Literary Supplement*.

Alexander Coleman is the editor of *Selected Poems* by Jorge Luis Borges (Viking).

Paul Dean is the head of the English Department at Portsmouth Grammar School, Portsmouth, England.

Stuart Ferguson is on the staff of the Leisure & Arts page of the *The Wall Street Journal*.

Roger Kimball's selection of David Stove's essays, *Against the Idols of the Age*, has just been published by Transaction.

Daniel Kunitz is the managing editor of *The Paris Review*.

William Logan's latest book of poems is *Night Battles* (Penguin).

David Pryce-Jones is a senior editor of *National Review*.

Harvey Shapiro's latest book is *Selected Poems* (Wesleyan University Press).

Floyd Skloot's new collection of poems, *The Evening Light*, will appear next year from Story Line Press.

Mark Steyn is the film critic of the London *Spectator* and author of the "Culture Vultures" column for *The American Spectator*.

Jenny Teichman is the author most recently of *Polemical Papers* (Ashgate).

Karen Wilkin's latest book is *Isaac Witkin* (Hudson Hills Press).

Robley Wilson is the editor of *The North American Review*.

Keith Windschuttle's most recent book is *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists Are Murdering Our Past* (Free Press).

David Yezzi is a Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University.

Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. December 1999, Volume 18, Number 4. Subscriptions: \$36 for one year, \$65 for two. Outside the United States, add \$7 per year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster and subscribers: send change of address, all remittances, and subscription inquiries to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. For subscription problems call (800) 783-4903. Copyright © 1999 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rt. 250, Milan, OH 44846. (800) 221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of the issue date. Internet: <http://www.newcriterion.com> Email: letters@newcriterion.com

Advertising: Galleries & fine arts: Fred Stern, 44 Paulin Boulevard, Leonia, NJ 07605. (201) 947-2674.
Publishers & others: Richard A. Vaughan, 129 Phelps Avenue, Rockford, IL 61108. (815) 398-8569.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman. It is set in 10-point Galliard and is printed by Science Press in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA.

The Sound of Great Ideas!®

The actual voices of... W.H. Auden
Robert Frost • Edwin Newman
Gilbert Highet • Edward DeBono
William Saroyan • Robert Lowell
Bruno Bettelheim • Sir Edmund Hillary
Stephen Spender . . . and many others.

HEAR what these provocative thinkers have to say about self-discovery, the quality of life, the nature of the creative mind, changes taking place in the world today, and what you can do to bring about change.

There's a difference in hearing new ideas rather than simply reading them. The author is able to provide his or her unique emphasis in ways impossible to accomplish in print. Pauses and tonal changes become meaning and create insights and increased understanding.

And audio cassettes provide a medium for learning experiences that

can be shared simultaneously with someone else, thus encouraging immediate discussion and interaction.

Today's audio cassettes capture the inflections, nuances and flavor of the original speaker, and let you hear them over and over while driving, cooking, jogging, etc. Since some of these voices will never be heard again, here's your opportunity to savor the sound of great ideas that have shaped today's world, and to own these cassettes for your library.

From the more than 4,000 titles in the prestigious Audio-Forum Library, we

have selected 26 extraordinary recordings. Imagine hearing these dynamic personalities in the intimacy of your own home! The regular price per cassette is \$12.95. But now for the special price of \$9.95 you have the opportunity to listen whenever and wherever you choose. PLUS for every 3 cassettes you buy, we'll send you a cassette of your choice FREE!

"The Sound of Great Ideas"
from Audio-Forum,
Suite P940, 96 Broad Street,
Guilford, CT 06437 • (203) 453-9794

The 26 audio cassettes listed here were chosen by a panel of experts who were asked to select only tapes which would be timely and relevant. Each has passed the simple test of genuine interest: "Would you want to listen to this tape again?"

HEAR these famous speakers:

- A** W. H. Auden: *The Poetry of W. H. Auden* (59 min.)
- B** Richard Avedon: *On His Work and Vocation as an Artist* (60 min.)
- C** Bruno Bettelheim: *Man's Identity in a Mass Society* (48 min.)
- D** Otto Bettman: *The Good Old Days: They Were Terrible* (55 min.)
- E** Nathaniel Branden: *Dealing With the Gifted Child* (48 min.)
- F** Carlos Castaneda: *Don Juan: The Sorcerer* (38 min.)
- G** Alistair Cooke: *America: An Outside View* (55 min.)
- H** Edward DeBono: *How to Change Ideas* (55 min.)
- I** Erich Fromm: *To Have or to Be: The Nature of the Psyche* (56 min.)
- J** Robert Frost: *An Evening with Robert Frost* (55 min.)
- K** Buckminster Fuller: *Twentieth-Century Renaissance* (55 min.)
- L** Thor Heyerdahl: *Waters of the World* (58 min.)
- M** Gilbert Highet: *The Art of Invective/A Bouquet of Poison Ivy* (30 min.)
- N** Sir Edmund Hillary: *Nothing Venture, Nothing Win* (55 min.)
- O** G. Wilson Knight: *Shakespeare and the English Language* (30 min.)
- P** Robert Lowell: *Reads and Discusses His Poetry* (28 min.)
- Q** Joseph Mazzeo: *The Idea of Progress: Science and Poetry* (46 min.)
- R** Ashley Montagu: *The Nature of Human Nature* (48 min.)
- S** Edwin Newman: *Decline and Fall of American Language* (55 min.)
- T** J. Robert Oppenheimer: *Relevance of Literature to Science* (19 min.)
- U** Asimov & Pohl: *Science Fiction. The Early Days* (55 min.)
- V** William Saroyan: *The Real World of the Writer* (48 min.)
- W** Upton Sinclair: *A Pen to Change America* (40 min.)
- X** Stephen Spender: *T.S. Eliot and George Orwell* (41 min.)
- Y** Paul Tillich/Adela Rogers St. Johns: *An Interview* (60 min.)
- Z** Eudora Welty: *Learning to Write Fiction* (53 min.)

☐ YES! Please send me the following selections at \$9.95 each plus \$1.00 shipping charge for the first tape, and .50 for each additional tape. (For shipments to CT, please add 6% sales tax.)

I understand that for every 3 cassettes I order, I will get one FREE!

My selections: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

My free selection: ☐ ☐

NAME (Print) _____

ADDRESS APT# _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

Total amount of order: \$ _____
(Including tax and shipping)

☐ Check or money order enclosed
☐ VISA ☐ Discover Card
☐ Master Card ☐ Diners Club
☐ American Express ☐ Carte Blanche

CARD # _____

EXP. DATE _____

SIGNATURE _____

Mail To: **AUDIO-FORUM®**
Suite P940, 96 Broad Street,
Guilford, CT 06437 USA
(203) 453-9794 • fax (888) 453-4329

Notes & Comments:

December 1999

Remembering the Cold War

The impending turn of the millennium may be based on dubious chronology, but these final weeks of 1999 nevertheless offer a good opportunity for stock-taking. Whatever else can be said of it, the twentieth century has been a study in contrasts. The mighty engines of capitalism have produced wealth beyond reckoning even as mankind's technological ingenuity has populated the world with dazzling instruments of comfort, inquiry, and diversion. At the same time, as Hilton Kramer notes in his reflections below, this "unrepentant" century has been, by far, the most murderous on record. Untold lives—numbering in the hundreds of millions—have been blighted or extinguished in the name of political ideology—above all Communist ideology—over the course of the century.

Facing up to the real dimensions of this evil has proved to be extraordinarily difficult—partly because the seductive nature of political ideology is felt even by those who have escaped its murderous rage. Indeed, it is not at all clear whether, even at this late hour, Western liberal opinion is prepared to acknowledge either the depth of Communist tyranny or the accessory nature of its own repeated capitulations and fellow-traveling. If the twentieth century has been the most deadly in history, it is also shaping up to be the most amnesiac.

We were reminded of this recently on the occasion of the ten-year anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9. A more eloquent symbol of freedom triumphing over tyranny is hard to imagine. As Charles Krauthammer noted in his column for *The Washington Post* ("Reluctant Cold Warriors," November 12), "the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union are events of biblical proportion. They mark the end of a century of totalitarianism." And yet this apocalyptic anniversary came and went virtually without fanfare. "The twenty-fifth anniversary of the release of the Beatles' *White Album*," Mr. Krauthammer noted, "caused more of a stir."

Why? Why is it that this historic anniversary passed without celebration or ceremony, passed with only perfunctory acknowledgment here? Because, as Mr. Krauthammer observed, "many people now in authority prefer not to be reminded that the last twenty years of the Cold War were not their finest hour, and that victory in the Cold War was achieved despite—not because of—their best efforts."

It may be difficult to remember this now when nearly everyone speaks blithely of America's victory in the Cold War. But it was not so long ago that liberal orthodoxy

snidely derided the very idea of the Cold War as the product of right-wing fanatics who mistakenly saw Communists under every bed. All that is conveniently forgotten now in the warm glow of complacency. But when Ronald Reagan described the Soviet Union as an “evil empire,” the liberal establishment was practically unanimous in its ridicule and outrage. As Mr. Krauthammer reported, Tweedledee and Tweedledum from *The New York Times*—Anthony Lewis and Tom Wicker—weighed in with their usual hand-wringing, calling Mr. Reagan’s comment “primitive” (Lewis) and “smug” (Wicker). Henry Steele Commager agreed: “It was the worst presidential speech in American history, and I’ve read them all.” George Ball, an apparatchik in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, published an open letter to President Reagan complaining about “your obsessive detestation of what you call ‘the evil empire.’” What, we wonder, would Mr. Ball have called it? Perhaps, like Lincoln Steffens, he looked at the Soviet Union, saw the future, and believed that it worked.

Had it not been for President Reagan and other cold warriors who, undeterred by liberal heckling, persevered in the fight against Communist tyranny in the former Soviet Union, in El Salvador, and elsewhere, Mr. Ball may indeed have been looking at the future. But when it finally arrived, he would have been given ample reason to repent his fatuousness. The Cold War was waged on two fronts: abroad against Communist tyranny, at home against liberal sympathizers who were naïve or mendacious or both. Mr. Krauthammer is to be commended for helping us to recall the realities of that second front.

We told you so

There are many reasons to be critical of multiculturalism. In practice, it is neither

“multi” nor “cultural.” Inspired primarily by ideological rancor, its partisans are always talking about “diversity,” but in fact they everywhere act to enforce strict conformity. Their “commitment to diversity” really means a commitment to a left-liberal tablet of values. Multiculturalists pretend that the traditional, Eurocentric curriculum is intellectually narrow and stifling, but it turns out that the multicultural curriculum is laughably superficial. The multicultural alternative to traditional education is little more than political posturing.

These are not arcane truths. Readers of *The New Criterion* have been exposed to them for years. We are gratified that the mainstream media are beginning to wake up to these elementary facts. Under the headline “Critics Say Emphasis on Diversity Squelches Basic Learning,” the Associated Press recently ran a story that confirmed what every sensible person already knew: multiculturalism promises diversity but delivers confusion.

The story, reporting on the results of a Harvard University study, has something of the amazed air of the man who one day first saw an elephant. What an extraordinary creature! “Books that used to teach school-children reading now focus too much on cultural diversity and not enough on laying a foundation for reading, writing, and thinking,” the story begins. Yes, and have you noticed how long its trunk is? The story goes on to quote Sandra Stotsky, a deputy commissioner of the Massachusetts education department and a research associate at Harvard University’s graduate school of education: “Children hop from culture to culture, century to century. You are not introducing them to a good literary foundation. You are introducing them to linguistic chaos.” Too true; and by the way, in case you hadn’t noticed, the beast is unusually large.

The Associated Press story is news only because the common-sense truths it reports

have been largely denied by the mainstream media. Multiculturalism is the approved, politically correct banner under which progressive sentiment marches. To reject multiculturalism is to reject an important part of liberal orthodoxy. This is the chief reason that one seldom encounters serious criticism of multiculturalism in the liberal media. It is gratifying to know that when an elephant wanders into one's living room, people sooner or later take notice.

Rename the Turner Prize

For some years now, the excellent English monthly review of books *Literary Review* has sponsored a Bad Sex Contest. Readers submit preposterous descriptions of sex from the current crop of novels, and the editors at the *Literary Review* have the delicate task of choosing the most awful candidate. Needless to say, there is always an embarrassment of riches. The winning submission is regularly accompanied by any number of honorable mentions. The same spirit informs the Bad Writing Contest sponsored by the scholarly journal *Philosophy and Literature*. Winners of that contest have included Homi Bhabha, Fredric Jameson, and Judith Butler—a triumvirate of absurd figures whose unintentionally laughable writing richly deserves the obloquy conferred upon it by the Bad Writing Contest.

With these noble precedents in mind, we would like to suggest that the Tate Gallery

in England consider renaming the once-prestigious Turner Prize. In recent years, the £20,000 prize has been given to a rogues gallery of artistic charlatans: Gilbert and George, Damien Hirst, the Chapman brothers, among others. This year, the chief contender is a woman called Tracey Emin. Her short-listed submission is called “My Bed.” Here is a description of it from the London *Daily Telegraph*:

Emin shows one new work, supposedly her own unmade bed, complete with torn pillows and urine-stained sheets, surrounded by ashtrays full of smoked fags, a box of sanitary towels, medicines, nylons, soiled underpants, a candle, a pregnancy test—the sad detritus of a life marked by physical illness and emotional disorder. On the gallery wall there's a neon sign in Emin's own script that says “Every Part of Me's Bleeding,” an appliquéd wall hanging (“F--- School”), and a wall of her scribbly drawings, in most of which the word “F---” is scrawled like an incantation, a guarantee of authenticity.

Joseph Mallord William Turner was one of the greatest painters England ever produced. Isn't it time to remove his name from a prize that travesties everything Turner stood for? The Tate Gallery does not employ the wicked satire that the *Literary Review* and *Philosophy and Literature* wield in their admirable contests. But a simple desire for truth in advertising demands that the Turner Prize be renamed. The simplest and most truthful alternative is readily at hand: the Bad Art Contest. We offer it to the Tate Gallery free and without charge.

Reflections on the end of the century

by *Hilton Kramer*

As we come to the end of this murderous and unrepentant century, in which a greater number of human beings has been violently put to death in the name of criminal political ideas than in any other century of recorded history, we are left confronting a moral void that shows few signs of being rectified or even addressed by what remains of serious thought in our civilization. A century of modernity, with everything this implies about the achievements of scientific inquiry and material progress, has proved to be a paradoxical benefaction. For our technological capabilities have long ago outdistanced our powers of moral discrimination, and this parlous condition has left us incapable of attempting either a moral reckoning of the past that has shaped us or a critical vision of the future that awaits us.

It is not only that at the end of this century we find ourselves devoid of political leaders who are equal to the task of comprehending the moral enormities that have shaped the modern age—and shaped it, moreover, under the banners of deranged social ideals. It is also a fact that much of mainstream intellectual life in our debased culture, especially in the universities and in what passes for ideas in the media, remains actively engaged in trivializing and subverting the scholarly disciplines which are essential to any true understanding of the catastrophes that have beset this terrible century. Let's be clear about the scale of the horrors we are alluding to. In his introduc-

tion to *The Black Book of Communism*,¹ which is now published in English two years after causing an immense uproar in Paris, the French scholar Stéphane Courtois offers the following assessment of Communism's victims:

U.S.S.R.: 20 million deaths
China: 65 million deaths
Vietnam: 1 million deaths
North Korea: 2 million deaths
Cambodia: 2 million deaths
Eastern Europe: 1 million deaths
Latin America: 150,000 deaths
Africa: 1.7 million deaths
Afghanistan: 1.5 million deaths
The international Communist movement
and Communist parties not in power:
about 10,000 deaths

"The total," writes Mr. Courtois, "approaches 100 million people killed" to serve the political imperatives of Marxist-Leninist regimes, a number that dwarfs even Nazism's achievement in causing what is now estimated to be some 25 million deaths. As for the disparate moral status still publicly accorded to the crimes of Nazism and

¹ *The Black Book of Communism*, edited by Stéphane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartošek, and Jean-Louis Margolin, translated from the French by Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer; Harvard University Press, 856 pages, \$37.50.

Communism in the Western democracies, *The Black Book of Communism* also has some important things to tell us.

One cannot help noticing [writes Mr. Courtois] the strong contrast between the study of Nazi and Communist crimes. The victors of 1945 legitimately made Nazi crimes—and especially the genocide of the Jews—the central focus of their condemnation of Nazism. A number of researchers around the world have been working on these issues for decades. Thousands of books and dozens of films—most notably *Night and Fog*, *Shoah*, *Sophie's Choice*, and *Schindler's List*—have been devoted to the subject. . . .

Yet scholars have neglected the crimes committed by the Communists. While names such as Himmler and Eichmann are recognized around the world as bywords for twentieth-century barbarism, the names of Feliks Dzerzhinsky, Genrikh Yagoda, and Nikolai Ezhov languish in obscurity. As for Lenin, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, and even Stalin, they have always enjoyed a surprising reverence.

And further:

The extraordinary attention paid to Hitler's crimes is entirely justified. . . . But the revelations concerning Communist crimes cause barely a stir. Why is there such an awkward silence from politicians? Why such a deafening silence from the academic world regarding the Communist catastrophe, which touched the lives of about one-third of humanity on four continents during a period spanning eighty years? . . . Is this really something that is beyond human understanding? Or are we talking about a refusal to scrutinize the subject too closely for fear of learning the truth about it?

In his preface to the American edition of *The Black Book*, Professor Martin Malia also addresses the question of this radical difference in the ways the crimes of Nazism and Communism are publicly perceived. "What of the moral equivalence of Communism with Nazism?" he asks, and the answer he gives is dour indeed:

After fifty years of debate, it is clear that no matter what the hard facts are, degrees of totalitarian evil will be measured as much in terms of present politics as in terms of past realities. So we will always encounter a double standard as long as there exist a Left and a Right—which will be a very long time indeed. No matter how thoroughly the Communist failure may come to be documented (and new research makes it look worse every day), we will always have reactions such as that of a Moscow correspondent for a major Western paper, who, after the fall, could still privately salute the Russian people with "Thanks for having tried!"; and there will always be kindred spirits to dismiss *The Black Book*, a priori, as "right-wing anti-Communist rhetoric."

In Mr. Courtois's attempt to account for what he describes as "the cover-up of the criminal aspects of Communism," the first reason he cites echoes Nadezhda Mandelstam's observation, in *Hope Against Hope* (1970), about the appeal exerted by the very idea of revolution. "In today's world"—and he is writing, of course, about the 1990s—"breast-beating over the idea of 'revolution,' as dreamed about in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is far from over. The icons of revolution—the red flag, the International, and the raised fist—reemerge with each social movement and on a grand scale. . . . Openly revolutionary groups are active and enjoy every legal right to state their views, hurling abuse on even the mildest criticism of crimes committed by their predecessors and only too eager to spout the eternal verities regarding the 'achievements' of Lenin, Trotsky, or Mao."

In Professor Malia's view, too, all attempts "at retrospective justice will always encounter one intractable obstacle. Any realistic accounting of Communist crime would effectively shut the door on Utopia; and too many good souls in this unjust world cannot abandon hope for an absolute end to inequality (and some less good souls will always offer them 'rational' curative nostrums). And so, all comrade-questers after historical truth should gird their loins for a

very Long March indeed before Communism is accorded its fair share of absolute evil.”

It is the great virtue of *The Black Book of Communism* that it brings us an up-to-date, scrupulously researched, and clearly written survey of what is now known about the consequences of this “absolute evil.” From a volume that runs to more than eight-hundred pages of text and notes, it is obviously impossible to cite every horror that is documented in this grim accounting of Communist crimes, but here are a couple of representative examples. This is Jean-Louis Margolin writing about the “inhuman repression” in Cambodia in the 1970s:

The lineage from Mao Zedong to Pol Pot is obvious. . . . The Cambodian tyrant was incontestably mediocre and a pale copy of the imaginative and cultivated Beijing autocrat who with no outside help established a regime that continues to thrive in the world’s most populous country. Yet despite Pol Pot’s limitations, it is the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward that look like mere trial runs or preparatory sketches for what was perhaps the most radical social transformation of all: the attempt to implement total Communism in one fell swoop, without the long transitional period that seemed to be one of the tenets of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Money was abolished in a week; total collectivization was achieved in less than two years; social distinctions were suppressed by the elimination of entire classes of property owners, intellectuals, and businessmen; and the ancient antagonism between urban and rural areas was solved by emptying the cities in a single week. It seemed that the only thing needed was sufficient willpower, and heaven would be found on Earth. Pol Pot believed that he would be enthroned higher than his glorious ancestors—Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong—and that the revolution of the twenty-first century would be conducted in Khmer, just as the revolutions of the twentieth century had been in Russian and then Chinese.

And, even closer to home, here is Pascal Fontaine writing about the Sandanistas in

Nicaragua in the late 1970s and early 1980s:

Roughly 150,000 Indians live on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua: the Miskito, Sumo, and Rama tribal groups, as well as creoles and Ladinas (those of mixed Spanish and Mayan ethnic background). Under previous regimes these groups had enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy and were excused from paying land taxes and from military service. Soon after coming to power, the Sandanistas began to attack the Indian communities, which were determined to hold onto their land and their language. Lyster Athders, the leader of the Alliance for Progress of the Miskitos and Sumo (Alpromisu), was arrested in August 1979 and killed two months later. Early in 1981 the national leaders of the Misurasata, a political organization that united several tribes, were arrested. On 21 February 1981 the armed forces killed seven Miskito Indians and wounded seventeen others. On 23 December 1981 in Leimus, the Sandanista army massacred seventy-five miners who had demanded payment of back wages. Another thirty-five miners suffered the same fate the next day.

And so on. The state of siege lasted until 1987, and, as Mr. Fontaine writes, “Fidel Castro played the role of mentor to the new regime.”

Here at *The New Criterion*, some of us have vivid memories of Daniel Ortega’s visit to New York in this period. He was feted with a grand party in the home of a well-known American pop singer, who lived in an apartment directly across the avenue from our offices. The New York Police Department had to station klieg lights and sharpshooters on the roof of the building to secure the safety of this Nicaraguan dictator and the crowd of radical-chic celebrants who turned out to praise the leader of the Nicaraguan revolution. The whole event had the atmosphere of a glamorous Hollywood opening. It was afterwards reported that one of Daniel Ortega’s missions in visiting New York was the purchase of the kind of fashionable sunglasses that could not be obtained at home. And let it be re-

called that this was the period in which the liberal press in this country regularly castigated the Reagan administration for supporting the Nicaraguan Contras in their resistance to Ortega's murderous regime.

It is to the question of "Why?" that Mr. Courtois inevitably turns in the final chapter of *The Black Book*. "Why did modern Communism, when it appeared in 1917, almost immediately turn into a system of bloody dictatorship and into a criminal regime?" he asks, and in search of some answers he—again inevitably—turns to the history of the French Revolution and to its preeminent twentieth-century analyst, the late François Furet. Quoting from the latter's *Dictionary of the French Revolution* (Harvard, 1989), he follows Furet in concentrating on one particular aspect of the French Revolution—the Terror—as a means of comprehending Bolshevik practice.

In several respects [Furet wrote], the Terror prefigured a number of Bolshevik practices. The Jacobin faction's clever manipulation of social tensions, and its political and ideological extremism, were later echoed by the Bolsheviks. Also, for the first time an attempt was made in France to eliminate a particular section of the peasantry. As the French revolutionary [Robespierre] declared to the Convention during the vote on the Prairie Laws: "To punish the enemies of the fatherland, we must find out who they are: but we do not want to punish them; we want to destroy them."

In this, as in so many other aspects of modernity, the French were indeed in the vanguard of history.

Yet Mr. Courtois is also concerned to distinguish the ways in which Lenin went even further than Robespierre. "Unlike the terror of the French Revolution, which with the exception of the Vendée touched only a small section of the population," he writes, "terror under Lenin was directed at all political parties and at all layers of society: nobles, the bourgeoisie, soldiers, policemen, Constitutional Democrats, Mensheviks, Social-

ist Revolutionaries, and the entire mass of the population, including peasants and workers. Intellectuals were treated especially badly." In the latter connection, he reminds us that when Maxim Gorky protested Lenin's treatment of the intellectuals, Lenin responded by declaring: "They're shit." "This response on the subject of intellectuals," writes Mr. Courtois, "is one of the first indicators of the profound disdain that Lenin felt for his contemporaries, even the most eminent among them. And he quickly passed from disdain to murder."

As to why this blight on the moral history of the century continues to baffle even some of the contributors to *The Black Book*, we would do well to turn to the last work completed by François Furet before his death in 1997, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, published in France in 1995 and now translated into English.² This may well be the most illuminating study ever devoted to the question of the appeal exerted not only by Communism but also by the Nazi and other fascist varieties of totalitarianism in this century. Furet's analysis is not, however, one that is likely to assuage the historical anxieties of the bourgeois readers to whom it is largely addressed, for in this inquiry into the political and moral tragedies of our century the very existence of the bourgeoisie is found to have played a key role.

Thus, in his account of the revolutionary passions that fueled the horrors of our time, Furet writes, "Of all those passions—spawned by modern democracy and bent on destroying the hand that fed them—the oldest, the most constant, the most powerful is hatred of the bourgeoisie"—which, it need hardly be said, includes the self-hatred of the bourgeoisie that is everywhere reflected in its cultural life, and has been from its beginnings. Furet writes:

It can be found throughout the nineteenth

² *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, by François Furet; University of Chicago Press, 600 pages, \$35.

century, before reaching its apogee in our time when the bourgeoisie, under its various names, would provide a scapegoat for all the calamities of the world for both Lenin and Hitler. The bourgeoisie incarnated capitalism, the forerunner (for Lenin) of Fascism and imperialism and (for Hitler) of Communism, which were the origins, respectively, of all they detested. Sufficiently abstract to contain many symbols, sufficiently concrete to offer a convenient object of hatred, the bourgeoisie furnished both Bolshevism and Fascism with their negative role, along with a supporting complement to older traditions and sentiments. It is an old, old story, as old as modern society itself.

It has been the melancholy fate of the bourgeoisie, Furet further observes, that “they would incarnate only the bad part of modernity: they would symbolize capitalism but not democracy.”

This is bad news, of course, and one is naturally tempted to reject its more sinister implications. Yet something akin to Furet’s reading of modern history has more recently come from the political philosopher Kenneth Minogue in an essay that poses a similarly melancholy question: “Totalitarianism: Have We Seen the Last of It?”³ “If in the twenty-first century,” writes Professor Minogue, “we should be threatened by freedom-destroying ventures seeking to create an ant heap society, the one thing we can be reasonably confident of is that they will not feature men in jackboots. Far from being announced by the drumbeats of revolution, they are likely to be stealthy and insidious. For what one must never forget about all totalitarian experiences is that they are created (though not necessarily sustained) by idealists thirsting for virtue.

What adds to the melancholy of such observations is the realization that our culture is now so lacking in the intellectual and spiritual resources needed to come to grips with such a precarious historical prospect. As Professor Minogue writes at the conclu-

sion of his essay:

The fact that modern technology has made so much of our culture instantly available tempts us to think that the world is now our oyster. In fact, all that is available to us is our culture *as formulated*, which is a small and insignificant part of what we are. . . . The reality is that cultural exhaustion is passing itself off as *le dernier cri*. Fortunately, because of the plurality of the West, we may still have the resources to find our freedoms anew. But it is important that we should know what is happening to us.

To which I would add that it is also important to know where we have lately been. And this returns us to the question of why as a culture we have been so morally delinquent in coming to terms with those one-hundred-million victims of Communist revolution in this century. The fact is, at the very moment in our history when we were most in need of rededicating ourselves to the telling of harsh truths about the crimes perpetrated by our Communist adversaries, our intellectuals were taking happy refuge in the mystifications of deconstruction and kindred attempts to discredit the very idea of historical truth. It was as if an intellectual Iron Curtain of highly sophisticated mendacity had been erected in anticipation of the fall of the actual Iron Curtain in order to forestall any prospect of a moral reckoning. With the idea of truth reduced to the status of a mere social construct—and thus dismissable as a malign instrument of power—history itself had been rendered absurd. Which may be why the tenth anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union in this last year of the century met with such a feeble response on this side of the Atlantic. Our culture was no longer in command of the moral intelligence that was needed to measure the scale of human suffering and loss that had been incurred as a consequence of eighty years of totalitarian terror. We can only hope that the price to be paid for such self-willed ignorance and complacency will not be as high in the next century as it has been in this one.

³ In *The National Interest* (Fall 1999, pages 45–54).

Was World War I necessary?

by Keith Windschuttle

One of the most popular books of Victorian Britain was Sir Edward Creasy's *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*, originally published in 1851. The copy I have is from the illustrated third edition published by Macmillan in 1905, by which time the book had been in print continuously for fifty-four years and reprinted no less than forty-five times. There was an edition published in London as late as 1960, and Da Capo Press reprinted it here in 1994 (404 pages, \$16.95). Creasy wrote the work after his return from serving as Chief Justice of Ceylon. Although he would now be dismissed as a "gentlemanly amateur," the scholarship he brought to the work was respectable enough and better than that of many academics writing today. Still, there is such a gulf between his work and current assumptions about the way history should be written that Creasy and his book, no matter how popular or scholarly they might have once been, are today regarded as museum pieces, of interest only for what they reveal about the ideology of Britain in the age of high imperialism. There are two main offences Creasy commits that put him out of step with modern taste.

For a start, Creasy's view of what were history's most decisive battles would be regarded today as narrowly Eurocentric, a string of events more relevant to determining the political boundaries of Western Europe, especially those of Britain, than of the world at large. Only one of his contests,

the American War of Independence, took place beyond European frontiers, while three of them (the battles of Marathon, Chalons, and Tours) were defeats for Asian powers (Persians, Huns, and Saracens) who challenged Europe. In its assumption that the emergence of Europe has been the most decisive development in world history, Creasy's book would today be dismissed by multicultural and postcolonial historians as Western hubris.

Moreover, the notion that an author might define the "decisive" battles of the world reveals a mentality directly at odds with the underlying assumption made by modern social science about the development of societies and civilizations. This is that the long-term course of history is determined by a combination of deep-seated structural and cultural forces, not by the kind of capricious factors that often affect the outcomes of battles, such as the tactics of generals, the discipline of armies, or the courage of soldiers. The belief that battles can be decisive implies that the subsequent history of the protagonists would have been radically different if the other side had won. Creasy does not select his fifteen battles by the size of the armies involved nor by the numbers of casualties. To establish the significance in each case, he proceeds by posing the counterfactual question "what if?" The battles he chooses to record are those that in his view, had they been lost, would have made the greatest differences to the shape of

civilization. For instance, if Charles Martel had not defeated the Saracens at Tours in 732, Islam would have been free to conquer most of western and northern Europe. An Arabian fleet could have sailed without contest up the Thames and may well have fulfilled Edward Gibbon's speculation that "the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet."

A wide range of twentieth-century historians, sociologists, political scientists, and philosophers are united in denouncing the counterfactual as an illegitimate intrusion into debate. The influential philosopher of history Benedetto Croce declared: "Historical necessity has to be affirmed and continually reaffirmed in order to exclude from history the 'conditional' which has no rightful place there." The conservative philosopher Michael Oakeshott also objected: "The question in history is never what must, or what might have taken place, but solely what the evidence obliges us to conclude did take place." Marxist historians and Weberian sociologists have concurred. Despite their theoretical differences, all agree that history is shaped by forces that are largely irresistible. The influential French *Annales* school has persuaded many people, especially fellow historians, that the real causal factors in history are long-term, deep-seated phenomena such as geography and climate, economic systems, social structures, and demographic patterns, coupled with the ingrained assumptions of religion, ideology, and custom, all factors that are beyond the ability of individuals to control. According to the leader of this school, Fernand Braudel, even dramatic events such as military defeats are of little consequence over *la longue durée*. They should be viewed as effects rather than causes of history. "Resounding events often take place in an instant," Braudel writes, "and are but manifestations of that larger destiny by which alone they can be explained."

Although he was writing more than one

hundred years earlier, Creasy anticipated such appeals to a "larger destiny" and identified precisely the problem they posed. "The reproach of fatalism," he wrote, "is justly incurred by those who, like the writers of a certain school in a neighbouring country, recognize in history nothing more than a series of necessary phenomena, which follow inevitably one upon the other." The neighboring country to which Creasy referred was Germany and the school he meant was that of Hegel and his followers, who saw history as a predetermined process working towards a definable end. Outmoded though he might be, Creasy is surely right to distinguish his own case from that of its logical opposite. Those who deny that counterfactuals are legitimate historical questions must be committed to some version of fatalism or destiny, to the notion that what happened in history was somehow meant to be.

The accounts offered by historians of both the outbreak and the outcome of the First World War have long sat ambiguously astride this explanatory divide. This war is widely regarded as the defining event of the twentieth century. Because it led to World War II and because this, in turn, created the Cold War, this century has been largely dominated by the events of 1914–18. The German defeat of the Russian army in 1917 created the crisis that allowed the Bolsheviks to take power. The terms and conditions of the peace imposed on Germany were so harsh that they crippled the German economy and created the conditions that brought Hitler to power. This side of the story would appear to support the argument for historical contingency. Had the victories on the eastern front been different and had statesmen at Versailles been wiser, Fascism and Communism may well have never seen the light of day.

At the same time, the origins of the First World War have traditionally been explained in terms of blind historic forces acting in ways that were outside the influence of individuals. This is true of the explanations offered by both the participants themselves and by most subsequent historians.

The key figure in the English decision to declare war on Germany, Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, later wrote of the events of July–August 1914 that they were “inevitable” and beyond control: “I used to torture myself by questioning whether by foresight or wisdom I could have prevented the war, but I have come to think no human individual could have prevented it.” The German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, expressed the same sentiment in his own memoirs: “Again and again I ask myself if it could have been avoided and what I should have done differently.” But he could think of nothing.

The historians who followed have continued to largely blame irresistible forces. Most have seen a combination of cultural influences—the ideas of nationalism, imperialism, and militarism—taking hold of the minds of both the governments and the populations of the European powers, wanting only a trigger to explode into conflict. Another account is the popular “war by timetable” thesis of the English historian A. J. P. Taylor. Although he said he rejected the argument that “profound forces” caused the war, Taylor’s own case is not that much different. He argued that, since the general staffs of all the major powers prepared war plans in response to the technological changes of the era, once a certain point had been reached, all-out conflict was unstoppable: “All were trapped by the ingenuity of their preparations.”

John Keegan, one of the two historians to bring out a major study in 1999, specifically rejects the case about technological adaptation.¹ He argues, in fact, that the generals of 1914 “lacked the wit” to perceive the importance of, or to adapt to their purposes, the principal technologies of the rail network, the internal combustion engine, or wireless telegraphy. Yet Keegan offers no definitive answer. At the end of his book he declares that the war itself and its origins remain “a

mystery.” All the deep-seated causal factors usually cited—the forces of nationalism, militarism, and imperialism as well as the military plans and timetables of troop movements—had been in place since 1871, but until 1914 they had not led to war. Keegan asks:

Why did a prosperous continent, at the height of its success as a source and agent of global wealth and power and at one of the peaks of its intellectual and cultural achievement, choose to risk all it had won for itself and all it offered to the world in the lottery of a vicious and local internecine conflict? Why did the combatants . . . persist in their military effort, to mobilize for total war and eventually to commit the totality of their young manhood to mutual and essentially pointless slaughter?

After almost 500 pages, Keegan admits he cannot explain it.

Keegan is one of the most respected military historians writing today. His books *The Face of Battle* and *A History of Warfare* are widely regarded as among the best historical writing on warfare ever produced. His history of the First World War was expected by many of his readers to be (and promoted by his publishers as) the definitive work on the subject. It will come as a surprise to many of his admirers to find not only that he cannot explain the cause of the war, but also that he cannot provide a satisfactory account of why Germany lost.

Between March and July 1918, General Erich Ludendorff, the German commander, launched a series of offensives on the Western front that penetrated British and French defences to a depth of up to twenty miles. In August, the Allied armies counterattacked and, with tank assaults backed by fresh infantry from the United States, Canada, and Australia, drove the Germans back to the line from which they had started. During this counterattack, however, large numbers of German soldiers began to surrender. By the end of September, Ludendorff advised Field Marshall Hindenburg that because his army would not fight

¹ *The First World War*, by John Keegan; Alfred A. Knopf, 475 pages, \$35.

and because the war had now become so unpopular at home, he should seek an armistice. Keegan emphasizes the demoralizing impact on the Germans of the combination of tank warfare and the large number of enthusiastic American troops who took the field at this time. However, he still does not offer enough direct evidence to satisfactorily explain why, after they had been models of consistency and loyalty for the previous four years, the German troops suddenly surrendered at this time.

One of the problems for anyone writing a book like Keegan's is the author's awareness that many if not most of his readers know a great deal about the subject already. This is because the First World War has been a topic on the high school history curriculum in all English-speaking countries for more than fifty years, because there have been so many movies and television programs devoted to the conflict, and because military history itself is a field that attracts a huge and highly knowledgeable readership, much of which is drawn from the ranks of former servicemen and -women. All of this works against adventurousness and partly explains why, despite his impressive scholarship and powers of description, Keegan's book is, ultimately, a disappointment.

Several of Keegan's more prominent newspaper reviewers coupled his work with that of another book on the same subject published at the same time, Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War*.² While Keegan is a mature scholar with a long-established reputation, Ferguson is a young man trying to make his. Ferguson, moreover, has proven very adept at attracting publicity. He is a Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford, and has been a frequent contributor to English newspapers. For the American release of his book, he scored a media coup in the form of lengthy personal profiles in *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*. Partly because he so transparently represents the cliché of the audacious youth attempting to topple the old

master, some academic reviewers have reacted against Ferguson, labelling him a brilliant showoff with more spin than substance. This was certainly my own predisposition before I read both books. Ferguson has produced a remarkable work, however. He has managed to survey this so familiar territory with a fresh vision, to ask interesting new questions about it, and to provide answers that have eluded others. While his book presumes a reader with a fair degree of familiarity with the events in question, Ferguson is the much more engaging of the two authors. This is partly because he is not attempting the more difficult task of providing a comprehensive narrative. Instead, he explores a series of problems about the war that others have found hard to explain, especially about its causes and its conclusion, and raises some issues that have not been addressed before at all.

The most unequivocal accomplishment of Ferguson's book is his demolition of the notion that the war was the product of great impersonal and irresistible social forces. He shows the war had little to do with imperial rivalry. The great imperial contests of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took place among those who subsequently became wartime allies—that is, they were between Britain and France in Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East, and between Britain and Russia on the borders of India. Rather than start a war, Britain chose to appease its imperial rivals wherever their territorial ambitions clashed. Nor was the war the product of the growth of a culture of militarism or radical nationalism within the countries concerned. Ferguson shows that advancing democracy within Europe had actually led to a decline in militarism in the decade before 1914, especially through the growth of liberal and socialist political parties running on peace platforms.

In place of inevitable forces, Ferguson substitutes the case for historical contingency. He achieves this by showing that at least four of the major protagonists—Germany, Austria, Russia, and England—

2 *The Pity of War*, by Niall Ferguson; Basic Books, 563 pages, \$30.

had options available in the prelude to 1914 that, had they taken them, either would not have led to war at all or else would have resulted in a much more restricted conflict than actually occurred. The outbreak of the First World War was not a mystery but the result of a particular pattern of decisions taken by each participant. Ferguson is especially good on Britain's decision to enter the conflict. It was not brought on by any treaty or agreement, secret or otherwise, that Britain had with France and was certainly not the result of the ostensible public reason, Germany's violation of the neutrality of Belgium. It was largely the doing of Grey, the Foreign Secretary, supported by Winston Churchill; they were a minority in the Liberal government's cabinet but persuaded their reluctant colleagues to go to war rather than let the opposition Tories into government.

Ferguson is also illuminating on Germany's predicament at the time. He attacks one of today's most widely accepted accounts, the argument of the German historian Fritz Fischer who claims Germany was the principal aggressor, deliberately provoking Russia and seeking a war to realize its ambitions for territorial expansion and continental hegemony. Ferguson argues that these were not prewar aims but ambit objectives formulated only after war had begun. He presents some persuasive economic and military data to show Germany was declining as a European power at the time, that it was concerned about the expansion of the already much larger Russian army and worried about Russian construction of railways that seemed designed to bring troops to its borders. Russia had twice as many men under arms, and even the French army was numerically superior to the German. The political and military hierarchy of Germany went to war because they saw their country growing relatively weaker, not stronger. They gambled on a preemptive strike in a "preventive war" in 1914 rather than oversee their continued decline.

Now, whatever success Ferguson has in defending these latter arguments in the fu-

ture, one thing seems certain. The case for the inevitability of the war has been mortally wounded. This is largely because Ferguson has used this debate to mount a persuasive argument for the revival of counterfactual analysis in historiography. Far from being spurious, as Croce, Oakeshott, and others have maintained, counterfactuals serve a legitimate role in the writing of history, just as Sir Edward Creasy and his Victorian readers thought. While the vantage of hindsight might persuade historians that they can identify the "necessary" causes of events, Ferguson says the world appears very different at the time to those who participate in those events, especially to powerful political figures. Their world of decision-making is one that is full of counterfactuals. They have to judge the outcome of their decisions and, in this process, must pose to themselves a constant series of "what if?" questions. To recover their thinking, historians thus need to recover the counterfactuals they confronted.

Ferguson has put this case in more detail in an earlier book, entitled *Virtual History*. There he argued that historians have to be "concerned with possibilities which seemed probable in the past." He cites the French medievalist Marc Bloch: "When the historian asks himself about the probability of a past event, he actually attempts to transport himself, by a bold exercise of the mind, to the time before the event itself, in order to gauge its chances, as they appeared on the eve of its realization." Similarly, the English historian Hugh Trevor-Roper has written: "It is only if we place ourselves before the alternatives of the past . . . only if we live for a moment, as the men of the time lived, in its still fluid context and among its still unresolved problems, if we see these problems coming upon us, . . . that we can draw useful lessons from history." While not everyone will agree with the conclusions Ferguson draws in applying this exercise to the First World War, it is clear that he has put the onus of the debate back onto the possibilities that faced the in-

dividuals who decided to commit their armed forces to battle. It is at this level that the real causes of the war have to be pursued and it is this perspective that allows us to make moral judgments about the decisions taken.

In making this case, Ferguson argues that Britain should not have entered the conflict in 1914. He claims that had the Liberal government not declared war, or even had the British Expeditionary Force been temporarily withheld while a general election was fought over the issue, "there is no question" that the Germans would have won a quick victory over France. Hence the mass carnage of prolonged trench warfare would have been avoided. Germany would then have gained a position of economic leadership within a European customs union, or common market, much as it has assumed today. Most importantly, in his opinion, Britain would not have been crippled by war debts and left as economically debilitated as it found itself after 1918.

After reading Keegan's account of the events of 1914, it is hard to accept this as a plausible scenario. The Schlieffen Plan drawn up by the German General Staff for the defeat of France was fatally flawed. The number of troops required could not physically fit onto the French roads of the day, and they could never have reached their targets in the time allowed. It thus could not have guaranteed a German victory, even in the absence of the British Expeditionary Force. In the event, the French army stood most of its ground and forced upon the Germans a war of attrition in the trenches.

Still, in his analysis of the war of attrition that did eventuate, Ferguson presents some of the most compelling arguments yet offered on the subject. His academic background is in economic history and he applies his skills in this field convincingly. He demonstrates that the German war economy was much more efficiently organized than its opponents and that the Central Powers killed many more members of the Allied armed forces than were killed of their own men. The Allies suffered 5.4 million

deaths, the Central Powers 4.0 million. In terms of cost per death—a macabre but nonetheless strategically relevant calculation for a war of attrition—he finds that it cost the Allies \$36,485 to kill a serviceman fighting for the Central Powers, whereas it cost the Central Powers just \$11,344 to kill an Allied serviceman. On these figures, he argues, Germany and Austria should not have lost the war. In fact, he argues that Germany made a mistake in suing for peace in 1918. Instead of supporting this case with evidence from the battlefield, however, Ferguson goes on to claim that it was a loss of nerve by Ludendorff—perhaps even a temporary nervous breakdown—after the failure of the Spring offensive of 1918 that led him to recommend an armistice. His decision surprised the British commander General Haig and the British cabinet who, as late as July that year, in the aftermath of widespread mutinies in the French army, had discussed the possibility of their own withdrawal from France. In Ferguson's view, the great mystery about the war is why the Germans did not win it.

The least credible of Ferguson's arguments concerns the surrenders of the German troops that occurred in August and September 1918 and which caused Ludendorff to believe his army was about to collapse. He devotes a whole chapter to the general question of surrender under the battlefield conditions that prevailed at the front. He provides enough evidence to establish that British troops shot many of the German soldiers they captured. It was against both military regulations and codes of honour but nonetheless a blind eye was turned towards the practice. Ferguson says German troops knew of these events—though he does not offer evidence about how they came to know—and thus had a powerful incentive not to surrender. Yet the fact remains that German surrenders in 1918 were critical to the outcome of the war. Ferguson cannot account for this and says a general explanation for the phenomenon "remains elusive." Unfortunately, Keegan's book does not pro-

vide enough detail to satisfy the reader on this issue either.

In most wars, surrenders on a large scale are rarely mysterious. Most troops recognize the risks involved and realize they stand a chance of being executed by their captors. Surrenders usually occur when there is no other course open except death, when men are surrounded by the enemy, when their lines have been overrun, when they have no communication with their commanders, or when they find themselves alone on the battlefield and cut off from retreat. There is enough evidence in other books about the retaking of the Somme in August 1918 by the Canadian and Australian Corps under Sir John Monash and of the assault by Pershing's American troops at Verdun in August and September to show that these were, in fact, the conditions under which German troops found themselves. They surrendered because they had no other choice. In other words, despite the Germans' economic efficiency, and irrespective of Ludendorff's psychological condition, the Central Powers lost the war because they were defeated in these two decisive battles.

Keegan concludes his book with the armistice of 1918 and devotes only a handful of pages to its aftermath. Ferguson, however, examines in some detail the extension of the war into the "postwar" era. He points out that, though they were weary of the war, men were not weary of violence. A series of bloody conflicts littered Europe with corpses for four years beyond the armistice—in Germany, Italy, Ireland and the Balkans. The most extreme case was Russia where, in the Civil War to consolidate Bolshevik power from 1918 to 1922, a total of 1.2 million soldiers lost their lives, compared to 1.8 million Russians killed in the First World War. Though Lenin and Trotsky had both been far from the battlefields during the great imperialist war and though their knowledge of armed conflict was limited to the history of Jacobin France, they were able to win the Civil War because they solved the problem of surrender and

desertion that had dogged the Tsarist army. Above all, Ferguson notes, it was Trotsky who in December 1918 ordered the formation of "blocking units" equipped with machine guns, whose role was to shoot front-line soldiers who attempted to retreat. "Thus was born," Ferguson records, "the elementary rule that if Red Army soldiers advanced they might be shot, but if they fled, they would definitely be shot."

Perhaps the best chapter of Ferguson's book is his examination of the impact the loss of the war had on Germany. The conventional wisdom is that the Treaty of Versailles, with its punitive reparations, crippled the German economy, led to hyperinflation that destroyed the savings of the German middle classes, and created the economic chaos that led Hitler to power. Hence, the First World War caused the Second. Ferguson demonstrates that almost every component of this story is sheer mythology. He is especially incisive in his criticisms of one of the principal authors of the myth, the English economist John Maynard Keynes. Ferguson shows that the arguments Keynes put forward in the tract that made him famous, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, originated with Carl Melchior, an advisor to the Hamburg bank of M. M. Warburg and Co. Keynes had met Melchior at Versailles and later said he "got to love" him during the treaty negotiations. Ferguson compares the texts of the German delegation's argument at Versailles, which claimed that the reparations were unpayable and would lead to social revolution, with Keynes's own writings, which repeated all their claims.

Both Keynes and the German bankers were wildly astray in their predictions. The reparations paid by Germany in 1920 and 1923 amounted to between 4 and 7 percent of national income. In the hardest year, 1921, the figure was 8.3 percent. This compares to estimates by Keynes that the reparations agreed to at Versailles would cost between 25 and 50 percent of German national income. The amounts paid were, in fact, considerably

less than the reparations France had made to Germany between 1871 and 1873, which amounted to 9 percent of national product in one year and 16 percent in the next. Moreover, the German economy was not at the time saddled with unmanageable levels of debt. The ratio of German debt to gross national product in 1921 was actually less than that of Britain. The inflationary spiral of 1923 was not due to reparations payments but to the irresponsible fiscal and monetary policies adopted by the Germans themselves.

Overall, Ferguson concludes, "the reality was that the economic consequences of the Versailles Treaty were far less severe for Germany than the Germans and Keynes claimed." In fact, he demonstrates that on some equations Germany actually came out in front. Between 1919 and 1932 Germany paid 19.1 billion goldmarks in reparations. In the same period, she received 27 billion goldmarks in net capital inflow, mainly from private investors, which were never repaid as a result of her defaults in 1923 and 1932.

Ferguson is also dismissive about claims that it was the combination of military defeat and the punitive Treaty of Versailles that can explain the rise of Nazism. Although Nazi propaganda made much of the wartime experience of Hitler and Goering, the movement by no means had a monopoly of appeal to veterans. In fact, the biggest postwar association of German veterans had been formed not by the Nazis but by the Social Democrats. Instead, it was Hitler's tough line on inflation that won him early support. His greatest electoral advance was made in 1930 when he promised to bring inflation under control by outlawing price rises and to set his storm troopers onto those who disobeyed. In 1933, when he recorded his greatest vote, 38 percent of those who voted Nazi had been sixteen or younger when the war ended. By then, Hitler was promising a solution not

only to inflation but to the Great Depression as well. "It was the post-war economic crisis," Ferguson argues, "not the war, which spawned Nazism; and with it the next war."

Ferguson concludes his book by declaring the First World War "the greatest *error* of modern history." If "error" means "unnecessary" and "futile," this is plausible, but if it means the mistake that had the most far-reaching consequences then his own evidence suggests otherwise. In terms of the total loss of life involved, it is certainly untrue. The comparisons are invidious, but Nazism in Germany and Communism in the USSR and China are the holders of the records on this score. In terms of economic disruption, the war was a loss rather than a victory for Britain but, as Ferguson himself shows, rapid postwar economic growth made good the losses of most of the combatants fairly quickly. On his own argument, Ferguson cannot claim the Nazi regime to be a direct consequence of the war. Moreover, the implications of his methodology are that, while the war certainly gave Lenin the opportunity to establish the Soviet republic, there were other factors more directly responsible for this particular catastrophe. The Bolshevik success in the Civil War was the more effective cause, which means that the Tsarist officers who served under Trotsky bear more of the liability for creating the Communist regime of the USSR than the German officers who are usually blamed for secretly transporting Lenin back to St. Petersburg. Hence there is not a direct line of responsibility from 1914-18 to the Cold War. In other words, the First World War did not dominate the twentieth century to anything like the extent usually claimed. Indeed, were someone to now compile a list of the decisive battles of history, he might not include the First World War in it at all.

Thomas Hardy & American poetry

by David Yezzi

*Heir both to Hardy and—no less—to Pound,
At which address now are you to be found?*

—Dick Davis, on Donald Davie

He does not think that I haunt here nightly:

How shall I let him know

That whither his fancy sets him wandering

I, too, alertly go?—

—Thomas Hardy, “The Haunter”

A few months after Thomas Hardy's death in 1928, and only weeks before his own, Sir Edmund Gosse recorded on two gramophone discs a memorial for his nearly life-long friend. While Hardy lived, Gosse declared, “if an Englishman of culture was asked: ‘Who is the present head of your literature?’, instinctively, without fear of discussion he would be answered: ‘Why, of course, Thomas Hardy.’” Gosse pronounced the top spot vacant, with no clear successor, though he knew enough of fame to add that any void Hardy left would be quickly filled.

Hardy's final collection of lyrics, *Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres*, appearing posthumously that year, delayed the decline of his poetic portfolio, but not for long. Certainly, enough “discussion” of his importance had arisen by the early 1970s to prompt the English poet and critic Donald Davie's compensatory claim that “in British poetry of the last fifty years (as not in American) the most far-reaching influence, for good and ill, has not been Yeats, still less

Eliot or Pound, not Lawrence, but *Hardy*.” Davie's assertion must have raised some eyebrows, particularly with those who saw (as many still see) Hardy as primarily a novelist. Even Davie himself, whose fealty was finally to Pound as much as to Hardy, qualified his statement with that deflationary “for good and ill.” In the end, Davie's taste for modernist experimentalism led him to fault Hardy for the excessive modesty and “diminished expectations” of twentieth-century British poetry, what A. Alvarez in his introduction to *The New Poetry* (1962) denounced as “the gentility principle.”

Davie's other telling qualifier, “As not in American [poetry],” suggests that, while the influence of Hardy was, like a river gas, permeating if not wholly salubrious in modern British poetry, it dissipated on its way across the Atlantic. But this fails to take in the entire scene, as Davie, who lived for years in the U.S., was in a position to know. What about Frost and Edwin Arlington Robinson, not to mention John Crowe Ransom, whose edition of Hardy's poems was a bellwether of increasing American interest? Don't they bear Hardy's imprint as fully as Larkin and Auden? Even Davie's beloved Pound lavishly praised Hardy on several occasions, acknowledging his debt in *Guide to Kulchur* (1938): “When we, if we live long enough, come to estimate the ‘poetry of the period,’ against Hardy's 600 pages we will put what? . . . No thoughtful writer can read this book of Hardy's with-

out throwing his own work (in imagination) into the test-tube and hunting it for fustian, for the foolish word, the word upholstered." This unlikely comment astonishes even more when one considers that the period Pound refers to extended well into the postwar years of high modernism. In 1934, Pound wrote in a letter from Italy that "nobody has taught me anything about writing since Thomas Hardy died."

Davie's assertion of Hardy's influence in England served as the opening gambit of his landmark *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (1972), recently reissued, with supplemental essays on Hardy and others.¹ Davie wrote the book in California during his ten-year stint at Stanford University, and his take on U.S. poetry tended to emphasize its break with British practice: "American poetry came to splendid maturity in the present century when American poets, if they needed to look outside America for guidance, at least looked elsewhere than to London," e.g., to the symbolism and surrealism of Paris or to Freud's Vienna.

On the whole Davie's is a slippery book, and a number of the best essays in the new volume—"Hardy's Virgilian Purples" (1972) and "Hardy and the Avant-Garde" (1961)—were not part of the original edition. While Davie's remarkable chapter on "Hardy as Technician" makes for essential reading, much of what did appear there revealed Davie's torn allegiance, which Dick Davis's epigram above (first told to me by the poet Dana Gioia) deftly lampoons. Of the non-Hardy selections in *With the Grain*, particularly pungent are Davie's considerations of Hugh MacDiarmid, David Jones, and a suite of essays on Basil Bunting, which readers of Davie's fine prose collection *Under Briggsflatts: A History of Poetry in Great Britain 1960–1985* (1989) will want to savor.

¹ *With the Grain: Essays on Thomas Hardy and Modern British Poetry* by Donald Davie, edited with an introduction by Clive Wilmer (Carcanet Press, 366 pages, \$29.95), is part of the projected Complete Works of Donald Davie.

All three of these authors may be found on the Poundian side of the Davie dichotomy. Ultimately, one is tempted to locate Davie's address closer to Rapallo than to Wessex; for him, the lineage of Pound proved most vital for the future of English verse. *Briggsflatts*, Bunting's extremely Poundian poem, Davie once argued, "is where English poetry has got to, it is what English poets must assimilate and go on from." The same, I think, could not be said for American poetry, in which the modernism of Eliot and Pound—for good and ill—has been run by subsequent generations in all sorts of unforeseen directions.

The general aptness of Davie's formulation notwithstanding, one spots immediately a number of important exceptions. Clearly, Hardy's hold on later British poets was not exclusive. Doesn't an insistent strain of modernism resound in not just Bunting but also the later, fractured sonnets and the *Mercian Hymns* of Geoffrey Hill, who is arguably the greatest living English poet? Conversely, if, as Davie implies, modernism has dominated the American scene, what first-rate poets has it influenced beyond, say, Berryman and maybe Lowell? Zukofsky? Olson? Cummings? Snyder? Duncan? Charles Wright? John Ashbery? One hundred years after Thomas Hardy confounded his readership by abandoning in mid-career novels for poems, it is clear, *pace* Davie, that in America Hardy has given rise to a parallel tradition.

Seen from some vantage point in the future, modernism—certainly the greatest experimental movement of the last hundred years—will loom large on the landscape of twentieth-century poetry, with *The Waste Land* among its High Sierras. But seen in the light of where it has led, namely to a cult of the avant-garde and to soulless postmodern *blague*, modernism, for all its greatness, has proven an end in poetry, not a beginning. If Bunting was Davie's prescription for the ills of contemporary British verse, perhaps what American poetry most needs at the moment is a horse dose of Thomas Hardy.

For those intent on total immersion, the salmon-colored paperback of Hardy's complete poems edited by James Gibson (Macmillan, 1982) may be easily acquired. Undoubtedly, not everyone will want to wade through the entire thousand pages, though I would agree with Philip Larkin that one can browse in Hardy "for years and years and still be surprised." Despite its bulk, Larkin did not "wish Hardy's *Collected Poems* a single page shorter." From the walks of Columbia University, Mark Van Doren lobbed a similar caution to would-be anthologists, asserting that "no poet more stubbornly resists selection. . . . There is no core of pieces, no inner set of classic or perfect poems, which would prove his rank. . . . It is the whole of him that registers and counts." Gosse, the first important critic to champion Hardy's verse, disagreed, arguing that to present the poems in their best light would require an editor's dry-eyed sifting and sorting.

The most prominent American selection of the poems appeared in 1960, under the stewardship of John Crowe Ransom. He had long been an admirer of Hardy's poetry, contributing an essay to the special "Hardy Centennial" issue of *The Southern Review* (Summer 1940), which included pieces by Auden, R. P. Blackmur, Delmore Schwartz, F. R. Leavis, and Allen Tate. Ransom, whose own poetry so closely recalls Hardy's, seemed the ideal conservator. The exchange of colloquial voices in "Eclogue," the ballad-like music of "Captain Carpenter," the wry tweaking of the divine in "Armageddon," all flow seamlessly down from Hardy's south of England to the American South. Take as one further example of kinship these stanzas from Ransom's "Parting, Without a Sequel," in which the envelope stanzas, rhymed *abba*, are a prosodist's nod to the letter at the center of the action:

She has finished and sealed the letter
At last, which he so richly has deserved,
With characters venomous and hatefully
 curved,
And nothing could be better.

But even as she gave it
Saying to the blue-capped functioner of doom,
"Into his hands," she hoped the leering groom
Might somewhere lose and leave it.

That "blue-capped functioner of doom" is perfect Hardy, though Ransom has taken it out of the abstract and given it the face of a messenger. Hardy used different names for the same phenomenon: "Crass Casualty," "purbblind Doomsters," "Spinner of the Years," the "Immanent Will." These impersonal forces wielded the scythe in Hardy's world, often lopping off hopes and ruining lives. Ransom and his fellow New Critics identified Hardy's preoccupation with "the irony of life," finding something sustaining in him as well. "There is a Spirit beyond the Spirit of Irony," Ransom wrote, "which we had best call the Classical Spirit. It is strong enough and wise enough to acknowledge the tragic event serenely because this bad luck has already been allowed for." Yet as Davie points out, Ransom failed to avoid certain pitfalls bedeviling an editor of that strangely irreducible body of work. Inevitably, a selection can never be all Hardys to all readers. Where among the 125 poems Ransom included are "After a Journey," "My Spirit Will Not Haunt the Mound," or "At Castle Boterel"? How did "The Voice"—possibly Hardy's greatest poem, certainly one of his best—slip so far in Ransom's estimation as to warrant exclusion?

Despite such odd omissions, Ransom's Hardy comes off winningly, due in no small part to the introduction. In it, Ransom makes clear his editorial slant: the poems, as he sees them, "are like quick but sure little dramas; or in their folkways they make us think of epics in miniature. But if we look for the genre which seems most likely to describe them we may call them fables." Thom Gunn, another British poet transplanted to the Bay Area, elaborates on this dramatic strain in "Hardy and the Ballads" (1972). As Gunn points out, a fair majority of Hardy's poems employs music derived from the ballad tradition. Of the mini-epic "During Wind and Rain," he notes that "the

genuine ballad mystery is its life blood," that what has been elided from the narrative as it moves from point to point accounts for its peculiar power:

They clear the creeping moss—
Elders and juniors—aye,
Making the pathways neat
And the garden gay;
And they build a shady seat....
Ah, no; the years, the years;
See, the white storm-birds wing across.

Each stanza of the poem, which describes the inability of a family to fend off the depredations of time, begins hopefully and ends in foreboding, until the last, which ends in death:

They change to a high new house,
He, she, all of them—aye,
Clocks and carpets and chairs
On the lawn all day,
And the brightest things that are theirs....
Ah, no; the years, the years;
Down their carved names the rain-drop
ploughs.

Tempus edax rerum. It is an old theme freshly handled here. "The years," serving as a refrain in the poem's four stanzas, press on as years are wont to do. And as they pass, wrenching changes occur, as above in the compressed move from the new beginning of furniture gleaming on moving day to the granitic finality of a tombstone streaked with rain. (It is worth noting that Davie saw this poem as essentially imagist in technique.)

Compare Hardy's ballad music with that of another melancholy fable, "Eros Turannos" by E. A. Robinson (1869–1935):

She fears him, and will always ask
What fated her to choose him;
She meets in his engaging mask
All reasons to refuse him;
But what she meets and what she fears
Are less than are the downward years,
Drawn slowly to the foamless weirs
Of age, were she to lose him.

For Robinson, too, the years are a corrosive force, and it is his heroine's fear of them and what she "knows of days" that lead her to choose badly in marriage. "Fate" makes an appearance; so do "the downward years." "Foamless" recalls Hardy's fondness for negatives such as "feverless" and "listlessness/wistlessness." (A telling exercise would be to tally Hardy's use of words beginning with *un-*.) As in the Hardy, Robinson's story ends on a dolorous note. Hardy received criticism for his relentless sadness, though for him the truth of things could only be got at through an unflinching look at the worst. The result, however, was often marked by what Larkin called "buoyancy and relish and toughness." And in the man as in the poems, it turns out. Hardy's second wife, Florence, once confided to a friend: "Hardy is now, this afternoon, writing a poem with great spirit: always a sign of well-being with him. Needless to say, it is an intensely dismal poem."

Something in the music and muscle of Robinson's poem enlivens it and draws us in. (Frost divined in Robinson a sense of play beneath "woes flat and final.") The poem echoes Hardy, with an added lilt from W. M. Praed's early nineteenth-century *vers de société*. Commenting on the ill-fated couple is a chorus of hard-bitten New Englanders, who observe the pair's decline with a chilly stoicism:

Meanwhile we do no harm; for they
That with a god have striven,
Nor hearing much of what we say,
Take what the god has given;
Though like waves breaking it may be,
Or like a changed familiar tree,
Or like a stairway to the sea
Where down the blind are driven.

The same weighing of alternate fates takes place in Hardy's moving elegy to his (kissing?) cousin Tryphena Sparks, "Thoughts of Phena." As Yvor Winters establishes in *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (1947), Robinson read and admired Hardy. Like Robinson, "Hardy wrote of the common life of his na-

tive region; his outlook was tragic; his style was both plain and powerful." How fitting that Hardy, England's first modern poet, should be admired by Robinson, the first modern American poet. Winters goes on to point out that while Hardy tended to describe the landscape and imply the situation, Robinson studied the situation and implied the landscape. This difference in method, however, does not obviate the affinity. Certainly the two poets had achieved the elusive combination of "plain and powerful." Hardy the plain-stylist, just one of the poet's many guises, takes a place alongside Hardy the imagist of "During Wind and Rain" (as described by Davie), Hardy the fabulist (Ransom), Hardy the balladeer (Gunn), and Hardy the epic poet of the Napoleonic Wars in *The Dynasts* (Gosse).

The unadorned, plain-spoken Hardy now serves as the basis for a new selection of the poems undertaken by the poet Robert Mezey, a former student of Ransom.² Mezey, whose introductory essay provides an exemplary overview, understands thoroughly the difficulties of paring the works of this particular poet. Bemoaning the limitations of space which forced out poems not of the first water yet which contained some line or passage worth preserving, Mezey makes clear his criteria for those he does include: "for me, the essential Hardy is a master of the plain style," and his best poems are "for the most part free of his more striking idiosyncrasies. Although a number of his finest poems are admittedly eccentric in style, he is generally at his best when his diction is most direct and simple."

In this, Mezey follows Winters, who in *Forms of Discovery* (1967) showed how Hardy "with a procedure which appears to be that of utter simplicity, . . . achieves great poetry" in such soft-spoken poems as "In the Time of 'The Breaking of Nations,'" and "The Wind's Prophecy," both of which

Mezey reprints. This edition also includes useful notes to the poems and a valuable appendix featuring Hardy's miscellaneous writing on poetry culled from his autobiography and letters. From Mezey's anecdotal résumé of Hardy's life, we learn a number of interesting biographical details, including the fact that he visited a phrenologist and the bizarre circumstances surrounding his burial (his body was laid in Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey, but his heart was removed and interred in Dorset). For readers coming to Hardy for the first time, and for those established fans who want a more portable edition of many of their favorite poems, Mezey's selection will be the one to have for some time to come.

Mezey includes another poem singled out by Winters (also Mezey's teacher, briefly) — "My Spirit Will Not Haunt the Mound," which the jacket copy lists as a "less-celebrated" work. Like Winters's other picks it lies firmly within the plain-style tradition:

My spirit will not haunt the mound
Above my breast,
But travel, memory-possessed,
To where my tremulous being found
Life largest, best.

My phantom-footed shape will go
When nightfall grays
Hither and thither along the ways
I and another used to know
In backward days.

And there you'll find me, if a jot
You still should care
For me, and for my curious air;
If otherwise, then I shall not,
For you, be there.

The poem made Robert Frost's hit-list as well (if not Ransom's). Next to it as it appeared in an anthology, Frost wrote, "[Hardy] is an excellent poet." No one else in Frost's marginalia for the book fared so well. Frost's letters contain such homey encomia as "Thomas Hardy's my man," and he "has taught me the good use of a few

² *Selected Poems*, by Thomas Hardy, edited with an introduction and notes by Robert Mezey; Penguin, 255 pages, \$8.95 paper.

words." Joseph Brodsky comments on the presence of Hardy's influence on Frost in his essays "Wooing the Inanimate" and "On Grief and Reason." As only one example, he notes how Frost's "Come In" revisits Hardy's "Darkling Thrush"—"Far in the pillared dark/ Thrush music went." (Brodsky wryly adds that like Frost "Hardy was also very fond of lonely strolls." Fair enough.) One sees Hardy distantly haunting such colloquial tragedies as Frost's "Home Burial," and more nearly in the music of "Reluctance" and "The Hill Wife." Hardy lurks, too, in the natural descriptions that barely mask Frost's dark and indifferent world. Such Hardian notes harmonize with Frost's particular fierceness, lending the poems a rueful charge. Consider these stanzas from "Desert Places":

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in
snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it—it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

In the first line alone, the repetition and the vocative announce Hardy to the ear. The multiple "it"s worked into the opening of the second stanza, and the chunky rhythm of the compound "absent-spirited" do likewise. (Frost admired Robinson, as well, and his famous words about "the highest ambition" being "to lodge a few poems where they will be hard to get rid of" were used in reference to Robinson, who "lodged more than his share.")³ Like Hardy and Robinson, Frost knew well how harsh landscapes, conveyed through rhyme and ballad-like cadences, could resonate with dire human situations.

³ Robert Mezey is also the editor of a new selection of *The Poetry of E. A. Robinson* (Modern Library, 256 pages, \$19.95).

As Mezey's edition demonstrates, Hardy's poems have real legs almost a century on, and much has been made of their modernity. Even so, Hardy suffers under some rather widely held misapprehensions. While he may have been a Victorian novelist, he was a modern poet—almost all of his poetry was published after Victoria's death in 1901. But Hardy's long life—and Victoria's—tends to confuse matters.

Shortly before his birth in rural Dorset in 1840, the Greek words for "light" and "writing" were first combined to describe the silver images of Louis Daguerre. By Hardy's funeral in Westminster Abbey eighty-eight years later, New Yorkers had seen television. In literary terms, Hardy's life spanned from *Oliver Twist* to *Orlando*, from "My Last Duchess" to well after "The Red Wheelbarrow." Hardy corresponded with both Patmore and Pound. He adored Swinburne, and copied bits of Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* into his notebooks. (In fact, as Christopher Ricks asserts, the diction of Hardy's "Spellbound Castle" may have been influenced by Eliot's earlier "Sweeney Erect." Also Eliotic in both diction and subject matter is the second part of Hardy's "Coming Up Oxford Street: Evening.")

Interestingly, Arthur Symonds, whose book on symbolism created a bridge between French poetry and Eliotic modernism, also wrote *A Study of Thomas Hardy* (1927). In it, he isolates Hardy's technical control and abiding melancholy: "In his verse, there is something brooding, obscure, tremulous, half inarticulate, as he meditates over men, nature, and destiny: nature, 'waking by sounds alone' and Fate, who sees and feels. . . . Blind and dumb forces conjecture, speak, half awakening out of sleep." One critic from Hardy's novel-writing days called this dark quality "Tessimism," after his ill-fated heroine. But pessimism was a label Hardy disliked, explaining in his autobiography that, while he had no faith in a benevolence underlying the workings of nature, he took great stock in the meliorating force of human "loving-

kindness, operating through scientific knowledge."

Hardy's vast empathy for all living things led him to some rather strange behavior. Max Gate, his self-designed house in Dorset, grew increasingly dark over the years because Hardy refused to trim back the encroaching trees for fear of harming them. Childless, he developed an excessive love of pets, laying boards from chair to chair so that his cats could climb about without touching the floor. The infamous dog Wessex (named for the region Hardy made famous in his novels and poems) was given such latitude at dinner that one guest, Lady Cynthia Asquith, later griped that she had to fight the beast for every scrap of food. Still, Hardy's great sympathy for nature's creatures ("What feeling do we ever find/ To equal among human kind/ A dog's fidelity!") extended most movingly to the characters of his tragic fables, if not always to the people in his life.

Hardy seems to have suffered a great disappointment in connection with his first wife, Emma Gifford. After a few years of happiness, their relationship descended into a barely tolerable *modus vivendi* of avoidance and silence. Hardy apparently fell for a number of other women; during their long marriage, in fact, according to his biographer Michael Millgate, Hardy was rarely out of love. The string of infatuations, which stretched from boyhood, included his cousin Tryphena Sparks, his neighbors Eliza and Jane Nicholls and Louisa Harding, the society wife Florence Henniker, the sculptor's wife Agatha Thornycroft, and the woman who was to become Hardy's second wife, Florence Dugdale. Millgate finds no evidence that Hardy was ever unfaithful to Emma, though Hardy seems to have made overtures on a few of occasions and been rebuffed.

When Emma died in 1912, a strange thing happened. Hardy repented his ill treatment of her, made a pilgrimage to the place of their first meeting, and began writing perhaps his most beautiful sequence of poems

in her memory, the "Poems of 1912-13." Hardy had already featured ghosts in his poems. Now he returned to them with new intensity, and it was Emma's ghost in particular that refused to let him go, in such poems as "The Haunter":

Yes, I companion him to places
Only dreamers know,
Where the shy hares print long paces,
Where the night rooks go;
Into old aisles where the past is all to him,
Close as his shade can do,
Always lacking the power to call to him,
Near as I reach thereto!

The realm of shades became for him the clearest vantage point from which to observe the pitiable plight of man, who despite all efforts was in thrall to the flukes of random "hap." It is in this regard that Hardy, by all accounts a reasonable and often retiring presence, most resembled the eccentricities kept in circulation by visionaries such as Yeats. "For my part," Hardy wrote, "if there is any way of getting a melancholy satisfaction out of life, it lies in dying, so to speak, before one is out of the flesh; by which I mean putting on the manners of ghosts, wandering in their haunts, and taking their views of surrounding things. To think of life as passing away is a sadness; to think of it as past is at least tolerable." As much as Hardy longed to see an actual specter ("I would have given ten years of my life"), he never did. But, if they failed to reveal themselves in life, they rattled about his "Souls of the Slain," "In the Night She Came," "Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?," "Something Tapped," and "Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard," among many others.

The same ghostly nostalgia haunts the work of the contemporary American poet Donald Justice in such poems as "Time and the Weather" ("And still sometimes these tired shapes/ Haunt the damp parlors of the heart") and "A Winter Ode to the Old Men of Lummus Park, Miami, Florida" ("Risen from rented rooms, old ghosts/ Come back

to haunt our parks by day"). In "Hell," the ghost of the poet R. B. Vaughn speaks to Justice, just as Hardy overhears spirits in so many poems. In "Invitation to a Ghost," for the poet Henri Coulette, Justice himself addresses the recently deceased:

I ask you to come back now as you were in
youth,
Confident, eager, and the silver brushed from
your temples.
Let it be as though a man could go
backwards through death,
Erasing the years that did not much count,
Or that added up perhaps to no more than
a single brilliant forenoon.

Again, "the years" present an eroding force that can be contravened only in imagination. Compare Hardy's "The Voice," another poem from 1912–13 in which the ghost of Emma appears, this time as a distant call on the wind:

Woman much missed, how you call to me,
call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who
was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you,
then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew
you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown.

Hardy excelled at the backward glance and suffered Orpheus-like the frustrations of watching his loved one repeatedly evanesce. As in "After Wind and Rain," time dons the robes of grim fate. Look again at the temporal pretzel Hardy makes of the lines "Saying that now you are not as you were/ When you had changed from the one who was all to me./ But as at first, when our day was fair," i.e., you were not as you were when you were not as you were. The poem looks back past these mutations to a time of

first love. Justice arrives at the same wish, "to go backwards through death" to that "single bright forenoon."

Such past-tense poetry as Hardy's must have been what D. H. Lawrence had in mind when he penned "Poetry of the Present," published as the introduction to the American edition of his *New Poems* in 1918: "The poetry of the beginning and the poetry of the end must have that exquisite finality, perfection which belongs to all that is far off. It is in the realm of all that is perfect. It is of the nature of all that is complete and consummate. This completeness, this consummateness, the finality and the perfection are conveyed in exquisite form." Exquisite form, that shining characteristic of Hardy, who mastered so many of the sounds of sense, was for Lawrence an object of derision, a veil over the raw experience of life unfolding in the eternal present of the poem. Just before Lawrence's manifesto lurches into vatic rant and utter blather, he makes his case for the function of free verse in his present-tense poetry:

Free verse is, or should be, direct utterance from the instant, whole man. It is the soul and the mind and the body surging at once, nothing left out. They speak all together. There is some confusion, some discord. But the confusion and discord only belong to the reality as noise belongs to the plunge of water. . . . In free verse we look for the insurgent naked throb of the instant moment.

The goal was "to break the lovely form of metrical verse, and dish up fragments as a new substance." Lawrence called this new substance *vers libre*, but, in view of all the atrocious writing this view has sponsored, I'm tempted to lend it a less generous designation. Hardy put little faith in the power of free verse, predicting in a letter to Robert Graves that it would never catch on in England (the Immanent Will seems to have had the last laugh on this point).

Not surprisingly, Eliot, a naturalized Englishman with whom free verse had

clearly caught on, disagreed. Eliot wrote little on Hardy, and what he did write was not favorable. Hardy, he argued in "After Strange Gods" (1934),

seems to have written as nearly for the sake of "self-expression" as a man well can; and the self which he had to express does not strike me as a particularly wholesome or edifying matter of communication. He was indifferent even to the prescripts of good writing: he wrote sometimes overpoweringly well, but always very carelessly; at times his style touches sublimity without ever having passed through the stage of being good. . . . [Hardy's] extreme emotionalism seems to me a symptom of decadence; it is a cardinal point of faith in a romantic age, to believe that there is something admirable in violent emotion for its own sake, whatever the emotion and whatever its object.

Eliot's point is well taken with regard to emotion in literature, yet considered from this side of confessionalism it could hardly seem to apply to Hardy. While accusations of verbal clumsiness were often made against Hardy, it is important to understand that Eliot is directing his comments here at Hardy the novelist, not Hardy the poet, in whom one presumes Eliot might have divined a greater reserve. Eliot's remarks are indeed prescient, when one considers the excesses that came after him in the name of "honesty" and in the unmediated emotionalism of much current poetry. But Hardy should not be blamed for this any more than Eliot himself. As Thom Gunn wrote, Hardy's "first person speaks as a sample human being, with little personality displayed and with no claims for uniqueness—with as little distinguishing him beyond his subject matter, in fact, as distinguishes the personages of the Ballads beyond their actions." Though nowhere does Gunn

mention it, his reference to "personality" suggests that he is writing in direct response to Eliot.

Apparently, Eliot and Hardy were destined to disagree on a number of subjects. For Eliot it was "exactly as wasteful for a poet to do what has been done already as for a biologist to rediscover Mendel's discoveries." For Hardy, though, the object was "to write on the old themes in the old styles, but to try to do a little better than those who went before us." As he says elsewhere, "What made poetry 2000 years ago makes poetry now." (Frost wrote that Robinson, too, "was content with the old-fashioned way to be new.")

Questions of influence are slippery. Certainly, modernism has left no contemporary writer untouched, and there are the fruitful legacies of Stevens and Moore not treated here. Yet poets in the vein of Hardy have provided valuable resistance to the poachings of "postmodernism," and its thin gruel of warmed-over modernism. It is the post-moderns who have exhausted—as the bedizened conceits of John Cleveland played out the techniques of Donne—the original and the authentic in modernism and replaced it with the derivative and the ersatz. The few poets I have mentioned here constitute the sketch of an alternate heredity, the lines of which may be deepened by the addition of others such as Weldon Kees, Elizabeth Bishop, and a number that Mezey mentions—Robinson Jeffers, Louise Bogan, Yvor Winters, Robert Penn Warren, Edgar Bowers, and David Ferry. Randall Jarrell supplied the answer to his own question in "The End of the Line": "Who could have believed that modernism would collapse so fast? Only someone who realized that modernism is a limit which it is impossible to exceed." It's something Hardy must have known.

Mary Warnock: the uses & abuses of philosophy

by Jenny Teichman

The dust jacket on Mary Warnock's latest book, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Ethics*¹ (henceforth *Guide to Ethics*), carries the following blurb:

Even before its publication, opinions expressed in this highly controversial book about ethics caused an uproar among thinkers and campaigners of different persuasions. . . . In no uncertain terms the highly respected philosopher and public figure Lady Warnock explains in this book how to distinguish right from wrong in areas ranging from euthanasia to abortion, Down's syndrome, education and genetic engineering.

Mary Warnock has been described not only on book jackets but also in the press as a philosopher and author with a high public profile and a distinguished career. The career developed as follows: Warnock graduated in 1948 and soon went on to teach philosophy at St. Hugh's College, Oxford. In 1966 she became headmistress of the prestigious Oxford Girls' High School. In 1972 she was elected Mistress of Girton College in the University of Cambridge. During the 1970s and 1980s, she served on some of the committees that from time to time are set up to advise the British Government on matters which, for various

reasons, are thought of as being too tricky for parliament to deal with head-on. She chaired the Committee of Inquiry into Special Education (1974–1978), served on the Committee of Inquiry into Animal Experiments and the Royal Committee on Environmental Pollution (1978–1984), and chaired the Committee of Inquiry into Embryology and Human Fertilisation (1982–1985), also known as the Warnock Committee. She has been a member of the British Scientific and Social Research Council and, though not a physician, she became a Fellow of the Royal College of Medicine in 1989, joining its advisory Group on Medical Ethics in 1992. She is an honorary fellow of two Oxford colleges and has honorary degrees from fifteen other universities. In 1985 she was made a life peer and became Baroness Warnock of Week.

Four of Warnock's earlier books are mainly expository. They are quite short but between them they explain the works of many important modern philosophers, including Kierkegaard, Bradley, G. E. Moore, Broad, Ayer, Heidegger, and Sartre. They are well written and sensible, and to my mind show Warnock at her best and most conscientious.

Ethics Since 1900, first published in 1960, contains a remark which throws some light on the later writings. In chapter two, Warnock says that idiosyncrasy in philosophy is not an admirable quality, a comment indicative of a propensity to join the big bat-

¹ *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Ethics*, by Mary Warnock; Gerald Duckworth & Co., 128 pages, £12.95 paper.

talions. Over the last thirty years the big battalions have been those for whom science is a religion and whose soldiers fight for legal positivism against the concept of natural human rights, for euthanasia against the Hippocratic Oath, and for multicultural relativism against absolutist ethics.

In the 1980s Warnock turned her attention away from the philosophers of the past to questions arising from her work on the committees mentioned above. She produced several new books, including *A Question of Life*, *The Uses of Philosophy*, and the *Guide to Ethics*.

A Question of Life is actually the report of the Warnock Committee, compiled by its chairman, i.e., Mary Warnock, who added two introductory chapters. The terms of reference given to the committee were:

To consider recent and potential developments in medicine and science related to human fertilisation and embryology; to consider what policies and safeguards should be applied; and to make recommendations.

The committee recommended that current treatments for infertility, including artificial insemination by donor, and the implantation of embryos produced *in vitro*, should be made available in special clinics licensed by a statutory body set up for that purpose. It further recommended that it should be lawful to use human embryos in research. Some embryos would be “spares” left over from fertility treatments based on *in vitro* techniques but others could be created especially for research programs. Research programs would require licenses from a statutory body set up for that purpose. No experiments should be performed on embryos older than fourteen days from fertilization: at fourteen days the embryo experimented on must be destroyed. These recommendations are now enshrined in British law. Warnock discusses them, and defends them, in chapter two of her *Guide to Ethics*, a chapter bearing the ludicrously inappropriate title “Birth.”

The committee consisted of sixteen members. Seven dissented from the recommendation to permit experimentation on human embryos,

Warnock’s next book, *The Uses of Philosophy*, comprises lectures given to non-philosophical audiences. It contains a defense of the Human Genome Project and a discussion of rights. Warnock does not believe in natural human rights.

The *Guide to Ethics* contains a further attack on the concept of natural rights, some discussions about euthanasia and abortion and the report of the Warnock Committee, and it asks the question “where does ethics come from?” The answer to the question begins by giving outlines of the philosophies of Aristotle, Hume, and Kant. Warnock believes that morality is largely a matter of sentiment, so she approves of Hume. She is also an anti-absolutist and therefore disapproves of Kant, whose *Critique of Practical Reason* she describes in the tones of a schoolmarm reporting on the work of a twelve year old:

[although his] analysis of the moral has much to recommend it . . . the doctrine of the categorical imperative really will not do.

Perhaps it was Warnock’s headmistressy authorial voice that caused her blurbist to tell us that she explains how to distinguish right from wrong “in no uncertain terms.” Indeed all her later writings display a confidence bordering on condescension. Yet behind that confidence, which I am sure must be genuine, and underneath an appearance of analytic clarity, there is a great deal of muddle and confusion. In her recent books Warnock generates some glaring inconsistencies, accepts premises which contradict each other, produces arguments which are plainly invalid, and misuses the language and techniques of philosophy—all quite unconsciously, of course.

Many people will no doubt find my last remarks unbelievable, preposterous, and perhaps even unethical. Others might well point out that very great thinkers some-

times contradict themselves. Great thinkers, though, rarely perpetrate simple blunders. Anselm's ontological argument, for instance, is a piece of extremely powerful reasoning and many centuries passed before it was refuted (if it has been refuted) by the powerful reasonings of Kant and Russell.

I find Warnock's moral philosophy confusing. It begins with the idea that public morality and private morality necessarily have different aims since public morality has to do with the purposes of governments whereas private morality is about the purposes of individuals.

What are the moral purposes of government? In some places Warnock says that public morality aims at justice and at securing rights. Rights, she says, are created by laws, which are created by governments. If that were true it would follow that government creates its own aims, pulling itself up by its moral bootstraps, as it were. In other places, however, she says that public morality is and must be based on consequentialist considerations, i.e., on utility; it must aim at the general good. But justice and the common good are not always compatible, a fact that was noticed long ago by some of the earliest critics of utilitarianism. Warnock's two different explanations undermine each other.

Her account of private morality is even more confusing. First, she says that private morality is based on principles that individuals try to stick to "whatever the consequences." Principles are dictates of conscience which force the individual to say (or think): "Here I stand, I can do no other." It follows that utilitarianism cannot be a basis of private morality, yet Warnock's own reasoning about ethical dilemmas is wholly utilitarian in character. Moreover her interest in the particular ideals held by principled people is mainly confined to a belief which she herself does not share, the belief that human life is sacred. (Why does she reject this ideal? Because of its supposed consequences.)

A second account defines private morality in terms of altruism. Now, altruism is not

inconsistent with utilitarianism but it doesn't sit easily with the idea of principles which must be adhered to "whatever the consequences."

This second account is complicated by internal inconsistency. Warnock denies that altruism is a disguised form of egoism but her own definition implies that it is just that. Altruism, she says, is the recognition that "we are all in the same boat"; you behave altruistically because you know the boat will sink, with you in it, if you don't.

There is a muddle about the idea of shame. Warnock points out, rightly in my opinion, that moral psychology rests partly on the capacity to feel shame. Unfortunately she goes on to say that shame is always the fear of what other people will think. Now, that proposition seriously undermines her first definition of private morality. How so? Because the principled individuals who say "Here I stand, I can do no other" are the very people who refuse to worry about public opinion. Sometimes, it is true, they have had to school themselves to ignore the opinions of others. But school themselves they do. Conclusion: either principled people are *shameless* (which is absurd) or Warnock's description of shame is no good.

Warnock both rejects and accepts the possibility that a particular practice or procedure might have unwanted side effects. Thus in the *Guide to Ethics* she claims that public opinion and peer pressure will suffice to discourage scientists from breaking a law forbidding experimentation on human embryos older than fourteen days, whereas in *The Uses of Philosophy* she admits that large financial gains plus love of self-aggrandizement can overcome the restraints of public opinion and peer pressure.

Warnock believes that the British law on abortion is rarely if ever abused, then lets us know (unconsciously) that she herself has connived at abusing it without getting into any trouble. On page 38 of the *Guide to Ethics* she says that it would be all right to

legalize euthanasia if, and only if, lawmakers could block the slippery slope running from justifiable killings to unjustifiable ones, though this, she thinks, might not be possible. She then gives an example of an allegedly successful legal block, viz., the law governing abortion in Britain. That law (as written) permits abortion only under certain precisely specified conditions. But on page 53 of the same book she writes:

As a headmistress, I more than once encouraged a sixteen or seventeen year old girl to have an abortion, as quickly as possible, and come back to do her A-levels. I do not regret these decisions.

The law on abortion does not list being aged sixteen or seventeen or being a schoolgirl faced with Advanced Level examinations among the conditions specified for legal abortion. Abortion law in Britain is broken so often that Mary Warnock has forgotten what it says. After a mere fifteen pages she has even forgotten what she herself has said.

More inconsistencies appear when Warnock tells us that there is a difference between practicing philosophy and using it. In *The Uses of Philosophy* she first says that applied ethics is a new variety of moral philosophy, then says it isn't philosophy at all: "[Nowadays] moral philosophy consists largely in the application of theory to immediate problems." But then:

I would be very much depressed if the essays in this volume were taken to license (worse still, exemplify) the dressing-up of the issues of the day with some fancy philosophical glad rags . . . in writing them I have doubtless made use of philosophy but I would not claim to have been practicing it.

Is there in fact a difference between practicing philosophy and using it properly? I can't see a difference any more than I can see a difference between practicing stage magic and using it. Is misusing a skill the

same thing as doing it badly? That's not right either. Philosophers practice philosophy badly when, for example, they perpetrate logical howlers. They misuse it when they employ its language and its techniques in order to bluff people into accepting poorly supported theories. It is misused, too, when unexplained jargon is employed in order to show off to undergraduates or visiting scholars. And it is also misused, in my opinion, whenever philosophers derive their doctrines from the supposed meanings of words—words which they themselves have redefined precisely in order to provide support for those doctrines.

Chapter four of *The Uses of Philosophy* ("The Genome Project") contains logical howlers as well as tendentious redefinitions of crucial words and crucial questions. Warnock wants to show that doctors and scientists must be trusted. Her conclusion rests on blatant equivocation:

Assumption: In the future it might be possible to misuse knowledge about the human genome. *Premise:* The only people who know what they are talking about [i.e., when talking about the genome] are the scientists working on the genome project. *Conclusion:* So the only people who can judge whether people in the future will abuse our knowledge about the human genome are the scientists working on the project.

When science becomes a religion it has to have benefit of clergy and it also has to have saints:

Somehow scepticism [about the motives behind the genome project] must be overcome . . . otherwise scientists and doctors will be unable to do what they genuinely want to do which is to continue to work for the general good.

Does she mean that *all* scientists and doctors *always* genuinely want to work for the common good? Does she include the men who invented mustard gas and nerve gas

and the neutron bomb? Does she include the kindly psychiatrists who used to work in the Soviet Union, drugging dissidents and electrocuting poets? Does she include the small but steady trickle of Western doctors struck off for maltreating their patients?

Bioethicists misuse philosophy when they support their theories with question-begging definitions. Warnock is no exception here. Her defense of those who experiment on human embryos partly rests on two special definitions. One is the over-familiar “philosophical” definition of *person* which pompously excludes certain kinds of human life from the class of “beings worthy of respect.” The other is a definition according to which early embryos are called pre-embryos. Just as pre-Christians are not Christians and pre-marital sex isn’t sex in marriage, so too a pre-embryo sounds like a *non*-embryo. Surely it is all right to experiment on a *non*-embryo!

There is more playing with words when Warnock assures her committee that the question “when does life begin?” doesn’t mean what it says. She says it means “when does a human being become worthy of respect?” But of course the two questions do not mean the same thing. The allegation of synonymy is a way of changing the subject while pretending not to.

Warnock is quite light-hearted about the possible misuse of knowledge. She thinks making universal genetic screening compulsory so that individuals judged defective can be refused insurance or employment is all right if “society” (insurance companies, employers) demands it. Knowledge of the human genome will not be used in bad ways because scientists and doctors always want the common good and because advisory committees will tell governments how and when to control the exploitation of knowledge. The first proposition is false; one doesn’t become a saint or a near-saint by receiving a scientific education, and if one did one would not need a committee to tell one what to do. As to the second proposition, even if it is true it gives no

guarantee that legislation aimed at controlling scientists will be either policeable or policed.

I will end this slightly caustic review by drawing attention to a piece of ignorance. In the *Guide to Ethics*, Warnock tries to explain the doctrine of double effect. She can’t have read anything much about the DDE for she thinks that it has been condemned by the Vatican. I am neither a Catholic nor an Aquinas scholar but I am as certain as can be (well, 99 percent certain) that the DDE is a central element in traditional Catholic teaching, that it is held to derive from Aquinas, and that it has never been condemned by the Vatican.

As I understand the matter, there is a “double effect” when an action has side effects as well as the results intended by the agent. If the intended effect is bad then the action is blameworthy even if there are beneficial side effects; this generalization, I believe, is accepted by all proponents of the DDE. It does not entail the seemingly similar generalization that the goodness of an intended effect suffices to make an action good. Some people might suppose they can see an entailment here but they are wrong. Warnock condemns the DDE partly because she has jumped to the conclusion that it approves of every kind of well-intentioned act.

There can be no general rule or “doctrine” for evaluating actions which have good intentions and bad side effects because side effects vary from the trifling to the important and from the certain to the unlikely. In this area it is necessary to consider different possibilities case by case. Kindly but thoughtless people who offer cigars to partly reformed smokers and sweets to diabetic children deserve blame and get it. Contrariwise, it is reasonable, if you are very ill, to take an effective medicine even if it causes nasty side effects. And your doctor acts properly is prescribing such a medicine.

Warnock says that the DDE, or rather her version of it, is “artificial,” “Jesuitical,” “dubious,” “shifty,” and—in some cases—

“absurdly pedantic,” “morally reprehensible,” and “ethically monstrous.” She suggests, too, that those who claim to believe it are thereby engaging in hypocrisy and game-playing. However this low opinion of the doctrine does not prevent her from drawing the following conclusion about doctors who practice euthanasia:

I am thankful that it has become more and more recognised, even by such hardliners as the Vatican Council, that the argument from

double effect will be accepted, and that doctors who deploy it will feel safe from prosecution.

Presumably she believes that game-playing will stop doctors from sliding down any dangerous unmarked slippery slopes. It has not done so in Holland, where doctors are safe from prosecution and where the number of known cases of euthanasia (both voluntary and involuntary) is frighteningly high.

Poems *by Robley Wilson, Harvey Shapiro & Floyd Skloot*

In summer, nothing happens

In summer, nothing happens.
The girls one hungers to love
have taken jobs by the sea,
the friends one banters with
are hauling Airstream trailers
westward into the mountains.
The neighbors have left only
their frantic dogs—boys
no one has seen before
come to scour the kennels.
A stranger on a riding mower
does all the lawns together.

What is the change in summer
of which one expects nothing?
Nature is not reborn,
nor does she perish except
in the streaks of a rare elm
that has outlived itself.
The weather conceals nothing:
the months are temperate,
even in the hardest rains
one may walk without a coat.
The gardens flourish, and bear
without a gardener's help.

Sitting in windows at night
black cats and their masters
look out on summer; the moon
feeds their yellow visions,
the opened windows cool them.
One learns to smoke a pipe
and is pleased for solitude.
One wants nothing to happen
forever, and thinks of those
who perhaps are ready to die,
except that it is summer
and they are putting it off.

—*Robley Wilson*

Prologue

We were approaching Berlin
at 23,000 feet, our usual
altitude for bombing. P38s,
looking like flying catamarans,
had accompanied us most of the way—
little friend, little friend—from Italy.
Now, nearing the target, we had P51s.
We knew that when their auxiliary fuel tanks
were jettisoned from their underbellies
and came floating down like silver baubles,
a sky full of them,
enemy fighters would shortly show.
A clear blue light flooded my cabin.
Through my window and hatch
I could see what looked like miles
of Flying Fortresses, the big-assed birds
in their tight formations. Blue all around them,
followed by white con trails. Later,
colored tracers would connect bomber
to enemy fighter, and then the black flack
would spread in the sky, a deadly fungus.
Planes would blossom into flame
in that bewildering sky.
How to believe all that happened,
as in a movie, a tv drama, or some other life.

—*Harvey Shapiro*

Dialysis

In my brother's blind and dying
eyes I was forever young.
He rocked and slept to the sound
of my voice as long as memory
played its tune. Then he woke
to speak of vast silver platters
heaped with meat and bouquets
of cheese, hot loaves the way
we found them on the island.
He said my breath had carried
the dream along. We were back
to back again in the Valiant's
front seat, doors gaping and feet
on the seething summer streets
of Flatbush. As his eyes closed
and sullied blood spun in loops
of plastic tubing, I watched
my brother closing down his life.
Time fell apart in his mind,
leaving nowhere but the past
for him to live. His will to sit
through this ritual cleansing
weakened as each day blended
until only sleep remained.

—*Floyd Skloot*

Letter from Mexico City

¿O plomo o plata?

by Alexander Coleman

All nations exhibit some degree of chauvinism, and embattled Mexico—"so far from God and so close to the United States" in the words of a distinguished ex-president—has certainly indulged in its share of nationalistic rhetoric and chest-pounding. But since the revolution in the early 1920s, Mexico has also opened out onto the world. It welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Spanish Civil War, and in general has pursued a cultural policy emphasizing the unity of Spanish-speaking peoples by means of prizes, symposia, invitations, and publishing houses that are open to all Spaniards and Spanish Americans. Just in the past year, for instance, the cultural arms of both the federal government and of Mexico City itself have been celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Argentinian poet Jorge Luis Borges with numerous symposia. As the editor of a recent bilingual edition of Borges's *Selected Poems* (Viking), I was invited to take part in a roundtable on the poetry of Borges. The symposium—which included such distinguished figures as the Argentinian poet Juan Gelman and the Colombian poet and novelist Alvaro Mutis—went off without a hitch, and one could only be impressed by this example of Mexican cultural catholicity. It is not at all clear that Buenos Aires would do as much for a comparable Mexican figure like the late Octavio Paz.

That's the good news about Mexico. My

recent visit reminded me that there is plenty of bad news as well. Although I was there for only four days, it was long enough to recognize that Mexico is a country in crisis. If I say this with surprise, it is because nothing in the American press prepared me for the reality of present-day Mexico. The political and financial imperatives flowing from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) seem to have tranquillized reporting about Mexico. For example, an upbeat story on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* recently told readers that "What Southeast was to U.S. Companies, Mexico is Becoming." "In the five years since the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement," the *Journal* reported, "U.S. manufacturers have moved in flocks south of the border, turning once-sleepy towns into rush-hour cities." But that pleasant prospect is belied by the fact that Mexico is undergoing its most extreme crisis since the revolution seventy-odd years ago.

The truth is that Mexico is struggling with a series of calamities, most of them man-made but a few of meteorological provenance. Each separately is serious; together they threaten to plunge the country into anarchy. It is a measure of the stalwartness of the present president, Ernesto Zedillo, now in his last year of his six-year term, that he is still viewed by most Mexicans with some degree of affection and sympathy.

Let's start with the economy. During

Zedillo's term, the buying power of the Mexican worker has declined by 47 percent. Since 1976, the buying power of that same worker has lost 93 percent of its value. Put another way, the same salary in 1999 buys you 7 percent of what you could have bought in 1976. Most Mexican families, except the garish plutocrats, are working at least two jobs. Hunger is evident in both city and country. The hijacking of full grocery carts in supermarket parking lots is not uncommon. In the busy downtown streets on a bright Saturday morning, each block had at least six uniformed policemen strung along the sidewalks.

Violent crime is rampant. Safety from open assault on the streets of Mexico City is clearly a major concern of editorial writers and commentators. At my hotel, when I inquired how I should get to a downtown museum for what turned out to be a superb exhibition of Mayan artifacts, the concierge told me that

For reasons of safety (*seguridad*), you must rent a limousine arranged by us for approximately three hours. The driver will take you to the entrance to the museum or else accompany you there. Make an appointment with him to be at that same spot after your visit of an hour and a half or so. Do not walk about the streets by yourself.

The budgetary crisis that began in the mid-1980s is ongoing, ameliorated from time to time by bailouts from the U.S. treasury. Barebones national budgets are scheduled for at least the next few years. The International Monetary Fund hovers over all questions of domestic spending. In March 1998, the government finally admitted that it had taken over in 1995 some \$62 billion in non-performing loans from about-to-fail banks. This represented 16 percent of the Mexican GNP for that year.

The influence of drug money and culture is also evident everywhere. It has invaded the lowest and highest echelons of the government and has been the subject of extensive coverage in U.S. journals. To take the

most notorious of examples from a few years back, President Zedillo had by 1996 despaired of using the infamously corrupt police force to make any headway with the war on drugs. He turned to the Mexican Army, created a National Institute for Combat Against Drugs, and named a ferocious-looking general, Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, as its first czar. The White House point man on drugs, General Barry McCaffrey, described General Rebollo as a "soldier of absolute, unquestioned integrity." After a mere two months, Rebollo was found to be living in a luxurious apartment owned by a feared drug dealer and taking bribes. He was cashiered and put on trial. The terrifying formula of the narcotraffickers may explain much: "¿O plomo o plata?," i.e., either accept our lead (in the form of bullets) or our silver (that is, our cash bribes).

Then there is also the matter of the single-party system and the dominance of the PRI, the Institutional Revolutionary Party. The previous president, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, nominated the popular Donaldo Colosio as his successor, but Colosio was assassinated under circumstances that remain murky. Sr. Zedillo, who had no ambitions to be president, was the substitute candidate. The corruption in the previous administration led to the conviction of the former president's brother, Raúl Salinas de Gortari—for conspiracy to murder his ex-brother-in-law Francisco Ruiz Massieu, a rising star in the PRI—and to the discovery of \$115 million spread around his 289 bank accounts in the U.S. and Europe. The ex-president himself, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, is in voluntary exile in Dublin, somehow reluctant to return to Mexico. Even President Zedillo is under a cloud; a Mexican banker now in an Australian jail fighting extradition alleges that he gave \$4 million in illegal contributions to the 1994 Zedillo campaign. The reporter Tim Golden's conclusions in *The New York Times* (July 11, 1997) about the ubiquity of the bribe in Mexico (known as "la mordida," or "the

bite”) are more germane than ever:

After insisting for years that Mexican corruption was an old affliction being cured by a new generation of political leaders, senior American officials have begun to acknowledge that the growing power and influence of drug traffickers have led to a law-enforcement crisis so deep that it threatens the stability of a country that shares almost 2000 miles of border with the United States.

And then there is the weather. During the Fall, the coastal and southern parts of Mexico were devastated by torrential rains. The tourist areas of Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Acapulco—tourism is Mexico’s second largest industry—were severely affected and the damage to crops has been immense and irreparable. Thousands upon thousands of livelihoods have been ruined, as have the structures, however humble, that many Mexican peasants have been able to call home. In beleaguered communities, still isolated by washed-out roads and bridges, even the bare necessities—potable water, basic nutrition—are lacking. Imprudently, Zedillo has refused all outside help.

I have saved the worst element in this bleak picture for last. There is a strike on in Mexico, one that has paralyzed the country from Zedillo on down. It is a strike of students at UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico. This strike has no parallel in American higher education. The events at Berkeley, Wisconsin, or Columbia in 1968 pale beside the damage already done to Mexico’s major institution of higher learning, and there is no amelioration or compromise on the horizon. The facts of the matter are daunting.

The gargantuan university called UNAM is the alma mater of the nation. Located at the southern fringe of Mexico City and occupying a campus which is a city in itself, it is the largest university in Latin America, perhaps in the world. Publicly funded by the federal government with a budget now approaching the peso equivalent of \$1 billion a

year, it has an enrollment of 270,000 students supported by a staff and faculty of around 30,000. It is governed by a single rector, who in turn is voted in by the fifteen members of a supervisory junta; this group in turn names the directors of programs and research institutes and the chairmen of departments from a list supplied by the rector. But the rector is at the top of this academic pyramid, and it is he who gives intellectual direction and establishes priorities for the future. A special feature of UNAM is its close relation to a chain of public secondary schools; graduates from these schools are eligible for admission to the university without entrance examinations.

In late April, Rector Francisco Barnés proposed drastic reforms. With the aim of raising faculty salaries, upgrading the infrastructure, expanding the library and computer facilities, and boosting scholarship funds, he announced a raise in annual tuition from the present ludicrous equivalent of two American cents to a fee equal to \$120. This was to be the first adjustment of fees in some fifty years. He also proposed expelling students who did not finish promptly and terminating the automatic entrance from high school. The poorest students would be exempt from the higher fees, while others slightly better off could postpone payment until they were wage-earners themselves. False data on any scholarship application would result in denial of admission or expulsion. A special feature of Rector Barnés’s proposal was that all students currently enrolled were exempt from any future payments. The new tuition fee schedule was to apply to students enrolling in 1999 and thereafter.

The students organized quickly, reacting to what they viewed as the first step toward the “privatization” of a wholly populist educational enterprise. A strike was called, a good number of students joined in, with more than a smattering of disaffected faculty. The university city, with all its satellite buildings, has been occupied and the campus closed since late April. A minority of students was able to struggle on in off-cam-

pus buildings and finish with final examinations. At the end of October, the students celebrated the sixth month of the occupation with a festive grand ball accompanied by the inevitable rock band.

It should be said that on June 7 the rector backed down and rescinded the projected fee plan. But by then the movement had taken on a life of its own and a whole series of demands was formulated, having to do with free university education for all, open admission from any high school, and elimination of time-to-degree limitations. One demand even stipulated that governance of the entire university was to be transferred to a board which would judge all educational programs and research in terms of their relevance to "the interests of the Mexican people."

On June 8 a dispatch from Mexico City published in *The New York Times* announced that "the administration [of the university] backed down before the students' protests, opening the way for a settlement." But as of this writing there is still no settlement, nor is there likely to be one any time soon. Meanwhile, there have been meetings with student leaders; committees of concerned emeriti professors trying to intervene; attempts at "dialogue;" "non-negotiable" positions announced *urbi et orbi*; mobilizations; verbal and at times severely physical confrontations; takeovers of buildings; failed attempts at dislodging the squatters; and even a few short-term kidnappings of strike leaders who have been swept off their feet into unmarked cars only to be released a few hours later unharmed.

Comandante Marcos, leader of the Chiapas revolt in southern Mexico, now celebrating "the 507th anniversary of the indigenous resistance to the colonizer," says that he approves of the student strike "because they are right." Masked rebels have visited the occupied campus, and students have gone south to Chiapas as a gesture of solidarity.

Although it seems that a moderate majority of students want to see an end to the strike, the ultras on the left are in control of

the situation. They envisage the demise of the present system as a direct path to a wholly reorganized system of higher education that is devoid of corrupting alliances with capitalism in general, above all of the North American variety with its reliance on things like computing, economics, accounting, and other sciences. In early November, the students are upping the ante, violently blocking traffic in the already-clogged city. When the Papal Nuncio, Monsignor Justo Mullor García, found himself in a five-hour traffic jam engineered by the strikers, he commented: "This is not the way to have a dialogue." Amen.

The more conservative newspapers in the city have been clamoring for police and/or army intervention for months. Even the liberal newspapers, although initially sympathetic to the students, have been discreetly suggesting some kind of action to dislodge the strikers and bring the campus back to normality. President Zedillo has denounced the "brutal aggression" of the students, and noted that "legitimate means can be used by the state to recover the occupied buildings." He appealed to the "silent majority" of students and alumni to take back the university from the miscreants. The rector and 150 professors spoke to the president at the end of August and asked him to intervene, but nothing has happened. One disenchanted professor said that asking the president to intervene was as efficacious as writing a letter to Santa Claus. So the question remains—is there no way to intervene in this educational and social catastrophe?

One problem is that there is no such thing as short-term memory in Mexico. Everyone remembers the army interventions just prior to the opening of the Olympics in Mexico City in 1968. President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz was increasingly irritated by student protests against the extravagant expenses incurred during the months prior to the opening, and he finally warned the students that new protests would be stopped "to avoid any further loss of prestige." According to Alan Riding in

his excellent *Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans* (1984), there was yet another meeting which took place in Tlatelolco Square in early October 1968, a meeting which ended with the army raking the whole square with machine-gun fire. The estimates of the dead range from two to three hundred, though friends tell me that a thousand is not out of the question. In any case, the blood was washed away by fire-trucks that same evening, and the Olympics started on time. President Zedillo, of the same, now-weakened, party as Díaz Ordaz, is reluctant to have his government make another move against student protestors. Inevitably, students and soldiers or police will die in such a confrontation. The students know that the government has been defanged by the events of 1968. When the army has been sent out to clear students from the highways in recent days, the young soldiers from the provinces are without pistols, rifles, or even the equivalent of nightsticks. They are issued only plastic shields to protect themselves against the torrent of rocks sent their way. The soldiers then throw the rocks back in the direction of the squatters.

With an election scheduled for July 2000, Zedillo does not want to be seen to jeopardize his party's chances by intervening vigorously in the strike. In a poll of four hundred citizens taken by the newspaper *El Universal*, 55 percent said that the government should intervene, 45 percent said that it should not. In all, 31 percent said that the fault lay with the intransigence of the rector, 25 percent blamed Zedillo, 11 percent said the students were at fault.

Although most of those polled thought that classes at UNAM would begin again sometime this year, time is running out. My friends opined that Zedillo will dump the problem onto the lap of his successor, which means that UNAM will not open till Fall 2000, if then. The push and pull between ultras and moderates is an ongoing

thing. Many of the most fervid participants are students in the UNAM-related secondary schools. Speaking to a journalist, one striker noted that "they called us Generation X, but we are showing them that we are a fighting generation not seen since '68." On the other hand, the faculty of the Schools of Veterinary Medicine, Social Work, and Political Science announced in late October that the student movement of 1999 "had lost its direction, is without consensus or rationality; they are people who believe that the university is only a trench from which ideological class struggles are launched."

The renowned liberal commentator Carlos Monsivais reluctantly had to admit that

I do not deny the immense responsibility carried by the university authorities for the shutdown of the university, but I must take note of the enormous degree of irritation the demonstrations have caused, the extremism without political or ideological validation, the deluge of Che Guevara and Mao portraits devoid of historical context, the level of intransigence demonstrated by the strikers.

Nine research institutes have been taken over, one the Geology Institute which warns the public about possible seismic activity. The staff of this institute was thrown out of its quarters forcibly. Their supervisor had a few things to say to the "students." "I am leaving behind eighty projects and delicate equipment worth two-and-a-half-million dollars. I hope you know what to do with it."

Student sentinels are now posted at all entrances to the campus, searching all visitors. If anyone protests at these procedures, the response is, "The people demand it! The university is paid for by the people! That's why it is yours! Defend it!" A sinister breach between polarized groups in confrontation grows wider every day. The situation gives ominous new relevance to the American phrase "Mexican standoff."

Theater

Badly awry

by Mark Steyn

The dawn of what the world has agreed to pretend is “the new millennium” is upon us, and everyone is looking back. My own local TV station is awash in one-minute “Millennium Milestones”—the Kennedy assassination, Elvis’s first number one, etc. The first 950 years of the millennium were apparently one big snoozefest but things really hotted up in the final stretch. Likewise, an ongoing poll I saw for Best Male Vocalist of the Millennium had Snoop Dogg and 2Pac Shakur tussling for the top spot, with Bing Crosby at seventy-three and Enrico Caruso at ninety-eight to add a little perspective to what otherwise would have been Best Muthafucka of the Millennium.

The theater, of course, stands in forlorn contrast to the rest of the arts: instead of nine-and-a-half centuries of cultural torpor followed by a period of unparalleled creative endeavor, the legitimate stage’s greatest hits are mostly pre-Elvis. Its lowly state is such that, in a Best Dramatist of the Millennium poll, W. Shakespeare would probably win, or at least tie for first place with Tony Kushner. Theater is not having a good turn-of-the-millennium, not compared to the last one: unlike the late twentieth, the late tenth century was a boom time. Liturgical drama was the hot new thing, developing from brief exchanges about scriptural episodes to encompass dialogue, music, comic characters. *Quem Quaeritis?* was the *Cats* of its day, but proved to have far longer coat-tails, and some of its spin-

offs (the nativity play, for example) survived the next ten centuries pretty much intact. Down at the other end of the spectrum, folk theater took off—a coarser vernacular tradition that gave us narratives that speak to us still (Robin Hood). Back in 999, Ye Olde Franke Riche was writing end-of-the-millennium columns marveling at how the stage had spectacularly bounced back from the sixth century’s theater closures, enforced on the arts by the intolerant demagogues of the religious right, etc. Similarly, the turn of the previous millennium was a good time for Roman drama, though Frankus Richus was probably deploring the increasing reliance on flashy spectacle. This millennium, it’s not looking so good: indeed, devotees of the stage seem to be gloomily preoccupied with whether the next millennium will be the first in recent millennia to have no theater at all.

You can’t blame them when the nearest thing to a hot ticket is *Saturday Night Fever* (at the Minskoff), the stage version of the motion picture of the magazine article (back in the pre-synergy Seventies, too: eat your heart out, Tina Brown). The only reason this thing is on stage is that the fellow who owns the rights figured he could make a little more dough off of it. Nothing wrong with that: it was, after all, commercial opportunism which motivated the first big British musical hit, *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), written by John Gay, produced by John Rich, and such a smash that it was said

at the time to have made Rich gay and Gay rich. Jonathan Swift, impressed, said that it had “not wit, not humour, but something better than either.” *Saturday Night Fever* lives up to the first two-thirds of Swift’s judgment with impressive thoroughness. That’s not entirely snobbery on my part. One of the most dismaying characteristics of stage adaptations of films is the way they leave even the cheesiest Hollywood tat looking deep and meaningful by comparison. *Saturday Night Fever* the motion picture contrasts the disco hedonism under the glitter ball with the grimy reality of life outside. Here, the reality scenes have been musicalized and so, without the contrast, the disco scenes lose all their liberating energy. I don’t mind that this is a piece of commercial opportunism, only that its creators are so inept that it’s a far less commercial piece of commercial opportunism than it ought to be.

Certainly, John Gay would be amazed. These days, theater still makes a lot of people gay, but rather fewer rich. The imperative behind *Saturday Night Fever*, which is a respectable one, is rarely addressed in the innumerable think-pieces on the state of the theater, but it should be. On the whole, I prefer my death-of-the-theater pieces to be written by professional critics. But lately *The New York Times* has begun soliciting analyses by practitioners, and they’re a far more disingenuous crowd. If you’ve ever spent ten minutes with a playwright or actor or choreographer, you come away marveling at the number of colleagues one showbiz professional can trash in that time. But, in print, a certain reticence sets in: invited to examine the cause of our “ailing theater,” the jobbing dramatist is understandably reluctant to finger producers, directors, actors, and labor unions he might one day have to work with. So, simply by process of elimination, there’s only one villain left. As Michael John LaChiusa, composer of *Marie Christine* (at Lincoln Center), wrote the other day:

I wonder—when complaints arise that the

subject matter of new musicals is too dark and the hummable songs are too few—if what most of Broadway’s audiences really want is a nostalgia booster shot: “Please take us back to a simpler time.”

I certainly can’t and won’t give them that fix. This country’s cultural psyche is darker today. It’s no exaggeration to say that America is having an identity crisis.

Etc., etc.

Really? By a “simpler” time, LaChiusa presumably means Vietnam, or the Civil Rights movement, or the dawn of the Cold War, the Second World War, the Depression, the Crash, Prohibition, the Great War, or virtually any other decade in American history, when our “cultural psyche” was darkened by “identity crises” of one kind or another—though we did not then so describe them. Only the most resilient generational isolationist could seriously believe that our times are uniquely “complex” and “dark.” Indeed, to some of us, the abiding feature of the American people today is a dozy contentment. I went to hear presidential candidate Alan Keyes a couple of months back: “America stands today on the brink of the abyss . . .” he began, and got cheerier from there. After the speech, I drove out of the parking lot and into a traffic jam for the first day of the new Wal-Mart.

Americans today have no credible foreign enemies, no unemployment, and a booming Dow. Admittedly, your average New York theater composer belongs to one of the few societal sub-groups to whom this triple blessing has not yet trickled down. After finishing the score for *Marie Christine*, LaChiusa says he was forced to pawn his piano: clearly, the booming Dow means nothing to him; unemployment stares him in the face; and foreign enemies, in the shape of those tight-assed Brits from the RSC, the National, and all the rest, keep threatening to annex every viable house on Broadway and off (even *Saturday Night Fever* is a London import). But, in today’s America, working theatricals (if you’ll for-

give the oxymoron) are uniquely disadvantaged.

That doesn't mean modern America is a heartening sight. There is a banality that comes with contentment: if by "simpler" time, you mean simple-minded—not to say moronic—than ours is simpler than most—as evidenced by our complacency over the extraordinary waste of money in public education or our inability to pay attention to foreign news (if Vietnam was the first television war, Kosovo was the first post-television war, banished from primetime due to lack of viewer interest). But that's an elusive subject, and beyond the capabilities of most dramatists. The truth is, whenever critics complain that fluffy musicals are killing off serious straight plays, they're mischaracterizing both forms: the straight plays available in New York are fluffier than anything on the lyric stage these days. If you don't like song and dance, you're left with a string of indistinguishable comedies about family and friendship, plus two monologues—one about a New Yorker having trouble adjusting to Sag Harbor, the other featuring women's musings on what clothes their vaginas would choose to wear. The musicals, meanwhile, are unrelentingly earnest and joyless—and, when their authors protest yet again that the times are too "dark" and "complex" to allow otherwise, we should hoot with derision. If ever there was an entertainer's age, this is it. But the American theater no longer knows how to entertain. *That's* its crisis.

The thought strikes you midway through the opening—"Another Op'nin', Another Show"—of *Kiss Me, Kate* (at the Martin Beck), back on Broadway for the first time since the 1948 original. The preview I saw was a little too early and a little too ragged, and there was much work to be done before the first night (one hopes). So I shall refrain from commenting on performances, except to commend the excellent female lead, Marin Mazzie. But, even in slightly raw form, you appreciate that its most obvious characteristic is one almost wholly absent on the

contemporary musical stage: ease; an utterly natural self-confidence in its ability to win you over in song. *Kiss Me, Kate* is not unambitious: it's a play-within-a-play play, the play within being *The Taming of the Shrew*, which the characters (led by a couple loosely based on the Lunts) are performing in Baltimore. But it wears its ambition lightly. The composer, Cole Porter, was intimidated by the source material until his librettist, Bella Spewack, who looked on the *Shrew* as one of Shakespeare's biggest clinkers, told him to forget the Bard and look on it as Yiddish theater: the younger sister (Bianca) can't marry until the older one (Kate) does—a Jewish custom which had motored innumerable Yiddish hits on Second Avenue.

"I swore it could not be done," said Porter, by which he meant that *he* could not do it. It was 1948 and the heyday of the Rodgers and Hammerstein "integrated" musical play, a much more serious affair than the frothy, glib musical comedy at which he'd excelled. He was convinced he was washed up, that he couldn't cut it in a world where musicals had somber themes, killed off their characters, and explored dark internal emotions in interminable dream ballets. Bella Spewack and her husband Sam were more relaxed. Before the show opened, they offered *New York Times* readers their own expert analysis of the differences between the new school and its predecessor: "You may remember that the old musical comedy consisted of a story, songs, dances, scenery, girls, and boys. On the other hand, the New Art Form consists of a story, songs, dances, scenery, girls, and boys."

Quite so. The Spewacks make an excellent point: the "dark" "complex" "music-drama" is nevertheless built from the same blocks as musical comedy—and, if you're uncomfortable with those elements, your ambition and your need to probe our cultural psyche won't compensate. Michael John LaChiusa is uncomfortable. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, to pluck at random, isn't. Story, song, dances, scenery, girls, boys, he was at ease with them all. So, too, is Cole

Porter. He was by no means a great “musical dramatist” but, for once, Shakespeare and the Spewacks gave him a strong milieu, and within it he produced a dizzyingly eclectic score. At the Martin Beck, the sense of pleasure in the stalls is palpable, as “Wunderbar,” “Too Darn Hot,” “I Hate Men,” “Brush Up Your Shakespeare,” “Always True to You in My Fashion” tumble over the footlights. But the stroke of genius is the finale, where the Spewacks’ book brings together both the play and the play-within-the-play for a joint resolution. The leading lady, Lilli, has walked out on the production and on Fred, so, having lost his Kate both on stage and off, Fred—as Petruchio—finds himself having to improvise the *Shrew*’s wager scene. Suddenly, Kate re-enters and sings “I am Ashamed That Women are So Simple”—Shakespeare’s words set to Porter’s music, a very literal union of source material and adaptor and, as such, it serves not just to resolve the *Shrew* but also to reconcile Lilli and Fred:

I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace
Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway
When they are bound to serve, love and obey.

Porter sets the text by composing an eighteenth-century arietta almost in miniature sonata form, and with a stately phrasing quite unlike any other Porter song. Yet, even though “I am Ashamed” uses the same key relationships as a Mozart aria, its harmony is unmistakably Porter. The flamboyant rhymester whose lyrics here invoke everything from Lassie to the Kinsey Report understood the structural progression of a classical aria but, more importantly, how to make it his own. Marin Mazzie delivers it beautifully. In 1949, John Mason Brown, writing in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, said of *Kiss Me, Kate* that “its only profundity is its skill, which is enormous.” In fact, in “I am Ashamed,” Porter brings the evening to a musical and dramatic close more profound than the equivalent moments in *Show Boat* or *Porgy and Bess*. But, that aside,

Brown’s distinction is a useful one: skill of a high enough order can be its own profundity. When Cole Porter adapts William Shakespeare, both men are keeping good company.

It’s hard to say the same over at Playwrights Horizons, where *James Joyce’s The Dead* has taken the stage. Whether the strangely proprietorial title is misplaced reverence or an attempt to shift the blame is hard to discern, but this production would be more accurately labelled *Richard Nelson and Shaun Davey’s The Dead*, a musical version of the best-known bit of Joyce’s *Dubliners*. Nelson is an American playwright who’s made a nice living in recent years as the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Yank-in-residence. When he writes about England and America, he has a keen eye for social nuance and historical detail. Unfortunately, the same diligence doesn’t extend to Ireland—beginning with Nelson’s choice of composer. Shaun Davey does not have the freewheeling confidence of Cole Porter, so he’s opted for a fairly consistent ersatz-Eirann faux-folk style. That may be Irish enough for Davey, Nelson, and apparently most New York reviewers, but anyone with any understanding of Gabriel Conroy’s maiden aunts would recoil in horror. You might hear music in a genteely faded spinsters’ drawing room in 1904 Dublin, but, without question, it wouldn’t be *this* music.

Even more bizarrely, confronted by both the musical references and the sheer musicality of the original text, the adaptors seem to have set about a deliberate demolition job. The story is suffused in music—both spinster aunts and their niece are music teachers—but, in deciding what to musicalize, Nelson and Davey are remarkably tone-deaf. Joyce’s final paragraph, with its weather-report quotation, is blown up into an “I am what I am” number for Gabriel Conroy, played by Christopher Walken. “Snow will be general all over Ireland,” chants Walken, tunelessly and with the blank look of a sleepwalker. In the most disastrous decision of all, Nelson and Davey

shift the pivot of the plot: the song that awakens Gretta's memories of a dead boy who once loved her is moved up and placed early in the evening, jarring the rhythm of the story.

These miscalculations are a pity, because in its tone the piece does occasionally conjure a Joycean sensibility and in Sally Ann Howes's performance as Aunt Julia it has the power to move, too. But it can never be profound because its authors are in crucial aspects so unskilled. The corniest shtick in *Kiss Me, Kate* isn't one-thousandth as crass as the moment when Molly's rousing hymn to Parnell is enthusiastically taken up by the entire company, until all are whoopin' and a-hollerin' around the drawing room. For this scene alone, Joyce would demand his name be chiseled off the front of the marquee. It's more idiotic than anything in *Saturday Night Fever*.

In 1961, recalling the Twenties, Robert Graves summed up the decade thus: "Coward was the dramatist of disillusion, as Eliot was its tragic poet, Aldous Huxley its novelist, and James Joyce its prose epic-writer." The difference between dear Noel and this more grueling company is a crucial one: "The world, I've come to think, is like the surface of a frozen lake," says Gabriel Conroy. "We walk along, we slip, we try to keep our balance and not to fall. One day there's a crack, and so we learn that underneath us is an unimaginable depth." Coward's characters, glimpsing that unimaginable depth, simply forget about it: no matter how cracked the ice, they keep gliding on the ever more brittle surface. Indeed, it's the tension of existing on the surface that sustains them. When you try to fill in the depths, they fall apart: Leonard Bernstein, Betty Comden and Adolph Green discovered as much when they briefly dabbled with musicalizing *Brief Encounter*, keeping Coward's dialogue but with huge Bernstein musical soliloquies added to express the characters' deepest, unspoken feelings. Not a good idea.

Coward was born in December 1899, on the eve of a new century whose mores he would delight in examining in plays, revues, operettas, and songs. On both sides of the Atlantic, an understandable desire to avoid the obvious has led to some curious centenary celebrations: in London, Vanessa Redgrave is currently appearing in *A Song at Twilight*, a late Coward play from the mid-Sixties, written when homosexuality was still illegal, about a closeted British theatrical—more Somerset Maugham than Coward himself; in New York, meanwhile, Weill Recital Hall is offering a semi-staged revival of *Sail Away*, a late Coward musical from the early Sixties. The author's innovations were long behind him by then, but he could still amuse, and his skill could enlarge even as antiquated a form as deckchair comedy.

In strictly musical theater terms, Coward is not, in any sense, a major figure; yet, more than Kern or Rodgers or Gershwin, he seems the very personification of the 'tween-wars golden age—the dressing gown, the balcony, the potency of cheap music. "Had a long think about what I really want to do," he confided to his diary, "a play for Gertie or me or both, short stories, a book or a musical. Wrote three lyric refrains for *Josephine*, worked at the piano. Suddenly a new and lovely tune appeared. Felt the authentic thrill. All right, the musical it shall be."

Well, that's settled. Somehow one gets the feeling it's not like that round at Michael John LaChiusa's pad. The master entertainer would have been mystified at the way his successors make such a meal of everything, to so little effect. Let his reputation rest on one tender, literate line in "I'll See You Again": "Though my world may go awry." That's such a lovely, unexpected word on those notes. Who but Coward would use it in a love song? "The most I've had is just a talent to amuse," he wrote. But that's a talent in short supply a century after his birth: it's the theatrical world that's gone awry, and badly so.

New thoughts about the Renaissance in Venice

by Karen Wilkin

The notion of revisionist art history raises eyebrows. All too often it means resurrecting figures forgotten for very good reasons or forcing well-established notions through a wringer of modish theory. But when art historical revisionism—or any other kind—is driven by a quest for expanded understanding rather than by a desire for novelty, it can usefully disrupt entrenched habits of thought. It can make us consider, instead of the obvious, predictable aspects of an artist's work or a period, fascinating zones of untidy, overlapping slippage and cross-fertilization. Intelligent revisionism can correct inaccuracies and make us see the celebrated and the familiar in fresh ways. Witness this Fall's ambitious exhibition at the Palazzo Grassi—a persuasive argument for reexamining even the most well-studied evidence. “Il Rinascimento a Venezia e la pittura del Nord ai tempi di Bellini, Dürer, Tiziano” (oddly translated by the organizers as “Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Bellini, Dürer, Titian”) should change forever the way we look at both Italian and Northern Renaissance art.¹

¹ “Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Bellini, Dürer, Titian” opened at Palazzo Grassi in Venice on September 5, 1999 and remains on view until January 9, 2000. A catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown, has been published by Rizzoli (702 pages, \$75).

The thesis, briefly, is that between 1450 and 1600 artists working in Venice, the Netherlands, and parts of Germany were engaged in a complex conversation that had profound ramifications for art on both sides of the Alps. It's a view that discredits the idea that the Italians single-handedly invented Renaissance art, except for oil paint, which was invented by the van Eycks and brought to Italy by Antonello da Messina, an Italian, or rather a Sicilian as his name tells us. This is roughly Vasari's version of events, born of a Firenze-centrism so profound that it led him to omit all reference to northerners in the 1550 edition of *Lives of the Artists* and to disparage them collectively as “various Flemish imitators” in a later edition. Vasari probably got this from his idol, Michelangelo, who is reported to have dismissed the *flaminghi* as concerned primarily with “external exactness . . . done without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion.”

Pace Vasari and Michelangelo, over the past three decades or so art historians (including Italians) searching archives, deciphering extant documentation, and scrutinizing surviving objects have made it increasingly clear that the relationship of north and south is best described not as a one-way flow from Italy, but as a turbulent eddy of international proposals and counter-proposals, echoes and challenges, assimilations and innovations. This current scholarship has informed many exhibitions

in recent years. In 1997, for example, the catalogue of the absorbing Lorenzo Lotto retrospective at the National Gallery, Washington, maintained that some of the eccentricity of this hard-to-classify painter's work was evidence of his affinity and admiration for artists from "north of the Alps." Similarly, in 1998, the catalogue of the Metropolitan's wonderful celebration of its holdings of Netherlandish Renaissance art included fascinating information about Italian collections of Netherlandish painters in the *quattrocento* and *cinquecento*, charted evidence of the influence of these artists, and discussed the efforts of some Netherlandish painters to satisfy the taste of their expatriate Florentine cloth merchant and banker patrons.

Yet despite the growing currency of such notions, the Palazzo Grassi exhibition, surprisingly, is the first devoted exclusively to the relationship of the art of Venice, the Netherlands, and Germany during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The show is accompanied by seven pounds of thoroughly annotated catalogue: a massive artifact even by present standards of catalogue bulk. Exhaustive contributions from more than a dozen international scholars, illustrations of everything in the show, a wealth of supporting images, informative entries on the history and technical details of each picture, and a slightly overwhelming bibliography will undoubtedly make this hefty volume the definitive work on the subject for years to come—despite the poor quality of its color reproductions and its dauntingly small type.

The catalogue is an impressive, compelling, and useful compendium of the latest scholarship, but the real excitement of the Palazzo Grassi show is its staggering selection of more than two hundred works by ninety or so artists assembled from museums and private collections from all over Europe and the United States. The only artist missing from the stellar roster surveyed by the exhibition is Giorgione, represented by but a single evanescent red chalk

drawing because, we are told, the Palazzo Grassi is planning a major Giorgione event in the near future.

"Renaissance Venice and the North" is a vast, exhausting, riveting, exhilarating exhibition that demands close attention from its viewers and rewards repeat visits, given the richness of the material—the show is installed in twenty-eight rooms—and the subtlety and complexities of the links between the exhibited pieces. It is really two exhibitions, since in the middle is the "Drawing Cabinet," a superb "show within a show" of drawings and prints. This cabinet provides vivid evidence of the important role of woodcuts and engravings in establishing connections, diffusing images, and making artists (and collectors) aware of what their peers elsewhere were up to. Because of conservation requirements, these works are isolated from the paintings that either served as their models or responded to their example. It's enlightening to check these relationships—helpfully underscored by the labels—by returning to the first sections of the show, but taking it all in thoroughly is almost impossible in a single visit, especially during peak hours when avid crowds make it difficult to backtrack. (Note to visitors: the last two hours of the day, from five P.M. until closing at seven P.M., are usually uncrowded and peaceful; weekends are to be avoided.)

With or without the luxury of repeat visits, the thematically organized installation allows the visual evidence so painstakingly assembled by the curators to speak eloquently. We are first greeted by a period map itemizing the routes that travellers of the day followed between northern Europe and Italy, with the appropriate places to break a day's journey conveniently indicated. Next comes an enormous, charming 1446 triptych, borrowed from the Accademia, showing an enthroned, gorgeously crowned Madonna and child, flanked by a selection of church fathers, in an elaborate architectural setting featuring pointed arches, interlaces, and vaguely Byzantine flourishes. Stylistically, the triptych is one of

those enigmatic transitional works in which wholly Gothic formality, elaboration, and hieratical size seem about to give way to a sense of naturalistic space, form, and characterization that can only be called Renaissance. Technically, it is the first known Venetian painting on canvas. But the real zinger is the triptych's signature. A collaborative work by two artists, it is proudly inscribed by Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni d'Alemagna—"John from Germany." Graphic evidence indeed of the thesis of the exhibit. And even more evidence follows.

Gallery after gallery present groups of works by artists from both sides of the Alps that bear witness to common ideals and (in some cases) common models and yet at the same time provide clear testimony to unbridgeable differences between the Venetians and their Flemish and German colleagues. The first grouping assembles luminous portraits in oil, executed between about 1450 and 1500 by Giovanni Bellini, Antonello da Messina, Lorenzo Lotto, and Hans Memling, plus one attributed to Petrus Christus and one by a follower of Jan van Eyck. Since the sitters, whether painted by Flemings or Venetians, are all Italian males and since many of the pictures can be traced to Venetian collections, the selection offers convincing evidence right from the start of an Italian appetite for Flemish art and possibly, for Flemish-type art given the similarities between the portraits painted by Netherlandish artists and those by Venetians. Whatever their origins, the authors of these portraits all share a fondness for the telling detail; they carefully itemize the clasp of a coat, the lift of an eyebrow, the expressive curve of a lip. They share, too, a keen eye for fashion, revelling in the precise line of a hairstyle, the angle of a hat, or the way a shirt peeks above a tunic. And they all delight in the delicate modulations permitted by oil paint, which if not invented by the northerners, as legend has it, certainly *was* perfected by them. (And yes, Antonello had something to do with its dissemination in Italy.)

At first glance, in fact, such similarities outweigh any differences between these elegant little pictures, apart from stylistic evidence that they were painted at various times over five decades of the *quattrocento*—the ease with which Bellini's and Lotto's figures turn and appear to amplify the space they occupy, as opposed to the tighter cropping and insistent frontality (despite the suggestion of angled shoulders) of the Petrus Christus and the Memlings. Yet longer acquaintance reveals other, more individual traits. The distant landscapes behind Memling's introspective sitters are distinctive, as is his conceit of making them appear to rest their hands on a fictive parapet congruent with the bottom edge of the panel. Distinctive, too, is Antonello's choice of a low viewpoint and the unflinching naturalism with which he presents the direct, skeptical gaze of his sardonic subject. Equally distinctive is the self-assured amplitude of Lotto's portrait of a patron and the serene elegance of Bellini's portrait of a very young man wearing the toga of a Venetian senator.

Periodically throughout the show, like a restated theme, this argument for the co-existence of common ideals and ingrained personal (and national) characteristics is made by such groupings of portraits. We encounter a trio of female portraits from the early 1500s by Dürer and two obscure Italians, followed by a spectacular group of slightly later half-length portraits by Titian, Palma il Vecchio, Lotto, Paris Bordone, and their northern contemporaries. And toward the end of the exhibition, there is a room of half- and full-length male portraits that provide unignorable proof of a more singular kind of influence: of Titian's being the preeminent model for both Venetian and German painters during the years when he was the favorite artist of the widely dispersed Habsburgs. The cumulative effect of these repeated, circumscribed assemblies of identical subjects—perhaps the most straightforward demonstrations of the exhibition's thesis—is to suggest that while it would be hard to confuse the work of nor-

therners and Italians, they obviously had more in common than Vasari would admit.

The full complexities of the relationship are gradually revealed by the exhibition's examination of a broad spectrum of themes: religious subjects; the changing role of landscape; myth and allegory; and genre. Early on, a group of interiors contrasts Antonello's ravishing little *St. Jerome in his Study* (c. 1475, National Gallery, London)—that exquisite demonstration of how to make a cozy, comfortable workplace in a big, drafty ecclesiastical hall—with a sharply focused image of Jerome in cramped quarters, albeit with a more attentive lion, attributed to Jan van Eyck (1442, Detroit Institute of the Arts). The Drawing Cabinet provides for comparison a sketch (c. 1503) by Vittore Carpaccio of St. Augustine in *his* up-to-date Renaissance study—preparatory to his celebrated painting in the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni. We are also offered a Carpaccio domestic interior, *Birth of the Virgin* (c. 1502–07, Accademia Carrara, Bergamo), so full of anecdotal details—a woman plucking a chicken, another drying cloths by a fire, another bringing a bowl of *pappa* to the new mother, a pair of rabbits—that it makes a Rogier van der Weyden-influenced Flemish Annunciation hung nearby look positively sparse, despite its catalogue of fifteenth-century bedroom furnishings.

Of course, Carpaccio's details are simply delightful fragments of the life of his times, unfreighted with the concealed symbolism that frequently lurks in northern images, but the pairing reminds us that Venetians and northerners alike took pleasure in sharply focused glimpses of the particulars of their surroundings. The Italians may have had a codified method for creating illusionistic space on a flat surface (once Brunelleschi got mathematical linear perspective down pat), but they also realized that there was something to be learned from the empirical observations of the *fiamminghi*. The northerners excelled at celebrating details of the quotidian, just as they excelled at painting complicated panoramic landscapes full

of distant crags, miniature towns, castles, shepherds, and men on horseback. The dazzling selection of works in the Drawing Cabinet makes northern influence on Venetian landscape imagery especially clear. In the gallery of interiors, seeing the van der Weyden-wannabe beside Lotto's eccentric *Annunciation* (c. 1533–35, Pinacoteca Civica, Recanati)—the one with the diving God the Father, the rhetorical angel Gabriel, and one of the least convincing cats in the history of art—makes even these essentially disparate works' similarities of spirit unmistakable.

What exactly are those similarities? A taste for the irregular, the disjunctive, and the unexpected, as well as the meticulously detailed—characteristics markedly unlike the ample, harmonious forms and rational geometric structures bathed in detail-suppressing light that we associate with Venetian painting of the *cinquecento*: the *maniera moderna* of Giorgione and the artists, like Titian, Veronese, and their colleagues, who adopted this new approach. But any suspicion that this taste for the complicated and the intricate was limited to northerners is quickly dispelled in the first part of the Palazzo Grassi show not only by suggestive pairings like that of the Lotto and the van der Weyden-follower, but also by groupings of closely related works by the young Giovanni Bellini, Andrea Mantegna, and Dürer that emphasize the persistence of this “un-Venetian” quality among Venetian artists. The dry, incisive line of Mantegna, the compression of his often aggressively cropped compositions, and the general tightness of his pictures look less idiosyncratic when they are seen beside a Dürer, just as Lotto's pictures look less like oddball Italian pictures (or possibly not quite successful *maniera moderna* pictures) when they are seen in a northern context.

Yet in the end, even the most apparently crabbed Venetian picture proves less cranky, less gnarled than even the most “Italianate” Dürer—suggesting, perhaps, that the Venetian *maniera moderna* was an inescapable regional “will to form.” A unifying play of

light and a subtle orchestration of color harmonize the complexities of the most densely packed, wiry compositions of Mantegna or Bellini while, conversely, even Dürer's most geometrically organized pictures are fragmented by his abrupt light shifts and staccato disposition of hues. The point is neatly made by pairing Cima da Conegliano's *Christ Among the Doctors* (1504–05, National Gallery, Warsaw) and a Dürer of the same subject from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, painted two years later, during one of the German painter's sojourns in Italy. The catalogue tracks the intricacies of the histories of these pictures, much of which is apparently debatable, but the visual evidence is unequivocal. There are strong compositional and conceptual similarities between the two images, but Cima's figures, while crowded, claim believable amounts of space for themselves, their simplified, dense forms made even more geometric by golden light. Everything in the harmoniously proportioned, horizontal canvas centers on a Leonardoesque Christ who calmly ticks off points on his subtly modelled, pale hands. For all its similarity to the Cima, the Dürer, by contrast, is jammed with grotesque figures whose positions in space and in relation to one another are ambiguous, at best. The young Christ is all but smothered by this unlovely crowd, while the tension of the moment is made emblematic in a knot of gnarly hands, front and center of the tight, square panel.

Eloquent as these juxtapositions of paintings are, the most explicit evidence of influence and reaction is to be found in the Drawing Cabinet. Obviously, the entire exhibition documents northern artists who travelled to Italy and Italians who went elsewhere, as well as pictures that crossed borders via commissions and collections. We can examine directly some of Titian's portraits of his Habsburg patrons, painted when he travelled to Augsburg, and German portraits that aspire to Titian's manner. We are shown influential works by Hieron-

ymus Bosch brought to Venice in the *cinquecento* (and still in the collection of the Palazzo Ducale) and some characteristically northern types of pictures eagerly collected by Italians—including a sexy little allegory of the power of love (or lust)—placed side by side with Venetian painters' responses to these examples. But important as these direct encounters were, woodcuts and engravings were the chief source of information for artists (and many collectors) and in the Drawing Cabinet, we can see, through a marvelous selection of works, just how particular images exerted their influence.

The story becomes more complex when we realize that while printmaking, like the printing of text itself, was at first a northern specialty, Venice's rapid ascent as one of Europe's great publishing centers meant that it also became a great center for producing images of works of art, both as book illustrations and as ways of spreading information about paintings. Much of the material in the Drawing Cabinet removes the exhibition's thesis from the realm of informed speculation and returns questions of sequence and influence to the domain of hard evidence. This salutary dose of the factual (and of brilliant drawings) at mid-point doesn't weaken the impact of the inspired assemblies of pictures that follow.

The last section of the show explores the idea that as the *cinquecento* progressed, Venetian painters, having assimilated everything they could learn from their northern colleagues and having mastered the technique of using oil, set the standard for what painting could and should be—or more accurately, Titian, having assimilated everything he found useful from elsewhere, by force of the sheer excellence and inventiveness of his work (and, the catalogue implies, a keen grasp of self-promotion) became the model to whom ambitious *cinquecento* artists, both Venetian and northern, looked; some of them even passed through his studio.

This section is rich in gloriously assured canvases that under ordinary circumstances we'd have to travel halfway across Europe to

see: Titian's enchanting *Virgin with a Rabbit*, c. 1530, from the Louvre, his opulent *Flora*, c. 1514–16, from the Uffizi, and his poignant *Ecce Homo*, c. 1560, from Dublin's National Gallery of Ireland; Tintoretto's dizzying *Origin of the Milky Way*, c. 1580, from the National Gallery, London; and a pair of large pastoral delights by Jacopo and Francesco Bassano, from the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum; plus a respectable number of important pictures from Kansas City, Toledo, Los Angeles, New York, and elsewhere in the United States.

The most spectacular room of the final section of the show brings together a remarkable array of voluptuous nudes by a textbook cross-section of German, Flemish, Venetian, and expatriate painters—Lucas Cranach the Elder, Jan van Scorel, Palma il Vecchio, Titian, lo Schiavone, and Lambert Sustris. All the pictures are apparently responses to a lost Giorgione—some (to complicate things) responses to the lost Giorgione filtered through Titian's powerful influence. In the work of the northerners and the Venetians alike, we can follow the persistence of Giorgione's propped-on-one-elbow reclining pose—the pose of Titian's celebrated Venuses, which Manet adapted for *Olympia* and Titian himself recycled for his Danaës—personalized in more or less suggestive ways. (*A Death of Cleopatra* attributed to van Scorel might alarm the prudish; no, nothing to do with the snake.) The works in the Drawing Cabinet enlarge the argument, but the paintings themselves offer proof of the role of engravings in transmitting influential images. We can follow the trail of right-left reversals and reversals created by the process of making engraved images of paintings, drawings from those engravings, and so on.

Perhaps the flashiest item at the Palazzo Grassi is a Carpaccio, or rather, two Carpaccios, described as “reunited after five centuries.” A long research project has concluded that the Getty Collection's enigmatic landscape of the Venetian lagoon with men hunting from boats, problematic because of its atypical subject and an inexplicable,

overscaled lily in the foreground, is really the top half of the Museo Correr's equally enigmatic painting of two women seated on a terrace surrounded by birds and dogs—a favorite of d'Annunzio's that Ruskin also declared to be “the best picture in the world.” The watery hunting scene is now believed to be the view from the women's terrace; the lily fits neatly onto a stalk projecting from a vase on the balustrade, the space is plausible, and the wood of the two panels is identical. It has long been known that the Correr picture is a fragment—the left half is missing, which is why the larger dog looks like an iguana. The latest word is not only that the two panels belong together and that the Getty's panel is the earliest illustration of cormorants on the lagoon, but also that the picture is to be interpreted as a mother and daughter waiting for the men to return from hunting. Maybe that's why they look so bored.

The only bad thing about the Palazzo Grassi show (apart from the long lines on weekends) is that it won't travel. But it's a wonderful excuse to go to Venice this fall.

Exhibition notes

“Renoir to Rothko:

The Eye of Duncan Phillips”

at The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.
September 25, 1999–January 23, 2000

This splendid exhibition brings together more than 350 works from the 2400-odd that Duncan Phillips (1886–1966) collected. Quite apart from the pleasures afforded by the dozens of masterpieces on view, the exhibition serves as a salutary reminder of the power that an individual sensibility can wield in forming and enhancing public taste. These days the word “dilettante,” like “amateur,” is used disparagingly to mean “not quite serious.” Originally, the OED reminds us, it meant “a lover of the fine arts, . . . one who cultivates them for the love of them rather than professionally.” Phillips was a dilettante and amateur in this older,

nobler sense. The museum he began in his family's townhouse in 1920—eight years before the Museum of Modern Art in New York was founded—is a living monument to the success of his passion. Together with Alfred Barr, Albert Barnes, and Alfred Stieglitz, Duncan Phillips educated the American public in modern art.

A scion of the Laughlin steel fortune, Phillips was the kind of large-souled and cultivated man that once upon a time gave culture a good name. He was an evangelist for the “joy-giving, life-enhancing influence” of art. While at Yale, he lobbied for the reintroduction of a course in art history (dropped for lack of interest) and deprecated the wholesale ignorance of high culture displayed by his peers. One graduate student, Phillips recalled, declared at dinner that “Botticelli is a wine, a good deal like Chianti only lighter. . . . He was rudely awakened by a sensitive friend to the fact that Botticelli is not a wine but a cheese.”

Duncan Phillips understood the advantages of being able to distinguish between Camembert and Cézanne, and the museum he went on to create is one of the world's great small museums, standing to nineteenth- and twentieth-century French and American art as the Frick does to the old masters. Phillips acquired only those objects he judged to be of superlative aesthetic quality. In 1923, commenting on his purchase of Renoir's magnificent *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1880–81), Phillips noted “for such an American Prado as I am planning, there must be nothing but the best.”

“Art offers two great gifts of emotion,” Phillips wrote, “the emotion of recognition and the emotion of escape. Both emotions take us out of the boundaries of the self.” Together with his wife Marjorie, herself a painter of modest achievement, Phillips devoted himself to keeping that avenue of transcendence open. He collected art, wrote persuasively about it in numerous books and articles, personally supported several artists—including Arthur Dove and Stuart Davis—and labored to make the Phillips Collection an oasis for bruised spirits.

For the current exhibition, the largest in the Phillips's history, the museum's curators, Eliza Rathbone and Elizabeth Hutton Turner, have put together a chronology of Duncan Phillips's evolving taste. Room after room is filled with extraordinary things: a suite of beguiling Bonnards (whom Phillips regarded as “the greatest living painter”); Matisse's *Quai Saint Michel* (1916); great Vuillards; brilliant works by Ingres, Cézanne, and Degas; magnificent paintings by Braque; good Klees; a Picasso or two; a splendid Chardin; abstractions by Mondrian and Kandinsky.

As the art historian William Agee remarks in his essay for the monumental catalogue that accompanies the exhibition, the Phillips Collection is also “the best place in the world to see American modernist art.” On view are superb pictures by Thomas Eakins, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and Charles Demuth; there are excellent things by Stuart Davis, Edward Hopper, Maurice Prendergast, Milton Avery, Arthur Dove, and (one of Phillips's particular favorites) John Marin. For better or worse, Mark Rothko gets a whole room to himself. There are a handful of splendid paintings by Richard Diebenkorn and, for those who like that sort of thing, a Jackson Pollock collage and a couple of Kenneth Noland's “target” paintings.

“Genuine taste,” T. S. Eliot remarked, “is always imperfect taste.” Some of Duncan Phillips's enthusiasms will strike many as exaggerated today: his passionate belief in the greatness of Augustus Vincent Tack (1870–1949), for example. (The Phillips Collection owns seventy-nine paintings by Tack.) Still, what is remarkable is how regularly Phillips got it right. It is worth noting, as well, to what great extent taste is as much a principle of exclusion as inclusion. Savoring the scores of masterpieces in this exhibition, we are tempted to forget how much is left out. Phillips responded immediately to the warm sensuousness of Bonnard, but he never had much interest in Surrealism; he thrilled to Braque, but Dada left him cold. He loved Diebenkorn, but found himself unmoved by Jasper Johns,

Andy Warhol, and Robert Rauschenberg. In 1927, Phillips wrote that he hoped to conduct “a free-lance war with the Academy” and help sponsor “the independent artist” against “the herd mind.” This exhibition reminds us of how well he succeeded.

—Roger Kimball

“Saul Steinberg: Drawing into Being”
at PaceWildenstein, New York.
October 1–October 30, 1999

Forget for a moment the *New Yorker* covers and ubiquitous posters; forget the Saul Steinberg with whom almost everyone is familiar. As the evidence of the magnificent exhibition “Drawing into Being” at PaceWildenstein demonstrates, Saul Steinberg was an endlessly inventive, whimsical artist of a very high order. While drawing remains the show’s focus, Steinberg’s peripatetic imagination led him from the drawing table into a number of media: collage, watercolor, wood sculpture, and oil paint among them. There are no overbearing masterworks in this show, no one piece that usurps center stage; it is rife with the inspired tinkering of a talent so generous, so encompassing in its drive, that it leaves nothing it encounters untransformed. He makes masks of brown paper bags. He draws on black and white photographs, turning a kitchen into a cityscape, a challah loaf into a car. Famously a creator of idiosyncratic maps, Steinberg—who immigrated to the U.S. in 1942—consistently provokes our solipsism, our point-of-view, which, as New Yorkers, usually begins at Lexington Avenue. In *Looking East*, an imperial gold-foil sun spreads over a vista that stretches from New York City through the Hamptons, Europe, a sliver of Asia, to California and back to New York again. Like our own mental cartographies, Steinberg’s maps are composed both of the details that matter to the individual—hotels, traffic, well-known buildings—and those random things that stray into consciousness, such as the date on a particular edifice or a few antlike people on the street. When com-

menting on a specific place, his style shifts to suit the location. For *Malibu*, he used shades of washed-out green, yellows, pinks, and aqueous blues. Foliage drips in the sunlight, ornamenting the landscape around a phantasmagoric version of California architecture.

Steinberg is a master of finding comedic possibilities at the intersection of the authentic and the fake. In the media collages, such as *The Pyramid Table*, all the artist’s tools—palette, brushes, pens, ruler, bread and cucumber for lunch—are cut from wood. Only the watercolor image of travelers standing before the Great Pyramid in the center is “real.” The work transforms a deadpan statement about the materials of an artist’s life into an occasion for delight—if the quotidian elements are wooden, they nevertheless provide a window into worlds of fantasy. In *Diary*, he satirized the passion for antiquated documents, filling the page with meaningless calligraphy, stains, and burn marks. Steinberg inserted faux stamps of authentication on drawings and mimicked musical notation. He even pastiched comic strips in which abstract forms (an antithesis to cartoon illustration) stand beneath nonsense thought-bubbles.

Though essentially a humorous artist, Steinberg displayed a surprising emotional range in his landscapes. Painted in oil on paper, these works usually feature large skies with delicately daubed-in clouds towering above low strips of subfusc land and tiny people, distinguished only by their clothes and actions, all of which occur well below the horizon. The effect is a voyager’s nostalgia, a watery beauty tinged with loneliness.

Of course, it is in the drawings themselves that his talent presents itself most starkly. His ink pen moved fluidly between the poles of comic illustration and fine rendering without ever losing its Steinbergian character. He frequently alluded to modernist masters like Braque, Kandinsky, and Picasso; even Cocteau’s facile lines at times grace the page. *Untitled (Braque Bric-a-Brac)* depicts a man free-associating in front of a Cubist canvas. In a bubble, his thoughts

obscure a large portion of the gallery as well as the other viewers, with the exception of their feet. No doubt Steinberg himself brought such intense concentration to his experiences of art. His own work certainly elicits from spectators a similarly world-eclipsing attention, in which only the drawing seems real.

—Daniel Kunitz

“Robert Longo”
at Dorfman Projects, New York.
September 9–October 30, 1999

How does Robert Longo’s work look in 1999? Exactly as it did some fifteen years ago when he briefly assumed the mantle of Eighties art star, although less engaging for its lack of development. In fact, the only things that seem new in Longo’s show of recent multiples and photographs at Dorfman Projects are the dates—all 1999. Longo’s signature figures, torqued and twisted yuppies, are still with us in the four three-color lithographs (in an edition of fifty) of two men and two women which form the backbone of this diminutive show. Anyone who has seen Longo’s previous images of stylized figures in shades of gray, black, and white will find it hard to discern any change of direction or emphasis here.

As if trying to maintain a distinctly Eighties sense of corporate heroism, Longo presents, on a white ground, two women in business attire and two men in suits, all of whom might have been pulled from the film *Wall Street*. There are some finely drawn details—hair filaments, the crease of a skirt—but the overwhelming impression given by these four lithographs is less of an attentive realism than of a curiously undirected expressionism. Why does the first woman toss her hair back with her arms in the air? Why does the other woman fall back, away from the viewer as though recoiling from a slap? Like those of the women, the men’s gestures seem equally fraught—one hunkers down as if absorbing a blow to the stomach, the other twists violently away, an el-

bow pointed skyward. They could be victims of a mugging; they could be dancing. Without a context to give their movements meaning, these individuals *in extremis* evoke only a sort of vague hipsterism, an untimely version of existential alienation.

The importance of fashion in these works is undeniable, but the clothes do not provide localizing effects; they offer few clues as to personality, status, occupation, or even time period. Like the clothes in advertisements, these are meant as notations, generic shells into which almost anyone might imagine him- or herself. Despite name-giving titles—Ellen, James, Sandy, Eric—the figures remain anonymous. These are corporate everymen, ciphers of our angst. And as such they elicit low-wattage emotional and aesthetic responses. Paradoxically, given the strained gestures, Longo’s figures are static, even stilted. One feels the artist straining for significance, thinking the energy implied by the wrenching gestures will ignite a reaction. His choice of screen printing, with its broad fields of contrasting grays and blacks, serves merely to intensify the sense of frozen, somewhat lifeless action, a sense to some degree mitigated in the more casual and more energized marks in the single drawing on display. The lithographs have none of the jaunty, jokey lightness of Pop images, in part because the overwrought attitudes of the figures are so obviously meant to impress the viewer with the seriousness of their commentary on urban life today.

Offering more color and context, the show’s three photographs, which served as studies for the lithographs, each depict a single torsional figure on a rooftop with the city spread out behind them. To a certain degree, the addition of color—the blue above, the flesh on the models—enlivens the photographs, but the bizarre poses inevitably recall the empty gesticulations of fashion photography. In the end, a fashion magazine ethos prevails in Longo’s work: its pumped-up style leaves only air at its core where the meat should be.

—Daniel Kunitz

The media

A child's view of the world

by James Bowman

It seemed a happy coincidence when Ken Burns's two-part series, "Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony," began its brief run on PBS (where else?) on the same day that Naomi Wolf appeared on "This Week" on ABC to explain a report in *Time* magazine that she had been hired by the presidential campaign of Vice President Gore at \$15,000 a month (later reduced to \$5000) to advise him on how to look more like an "alpha male." This he was to do by (among other things, presumably) wearing suits in "earth tones." The juxtaposition was too delicious. What, one wondered, would Mrs. Stanton and Miss Anthony have thought about the seemliness of this young celebrator of female "promiscuities" explaining the principle on which the hard-won women's ballot is to be cast in the next presidential election? More recent feminists have told us that the personal is the political, but even they can hardly have foreseen just how personal the political was to have become by the end of the millennium.

Indeed, loose talk about "alpha males" suggests that it has become not so much personal as animal, as if it were perfectly natural to think of the democratic politics of a highly developed human society as if it were homologous with the hierarchical disposition of a pack of wolves (or Wolfs?) or a troop of baboons, as this was generally thought to be the nearer parallel. The "alpha male" in politics seems to date from the

Monica Lewinsky affair of last year, when Gene Lyons sought to apologize for President Clinton's behavior with Miss Lewinsky by saying that "if you take someone like the President, who a lot of women would find attractive if he came to fix their garbage disposal, and you make him the President of the United States, the alpha male of the United States of America, and you sexualize his image with a lot of smears and false accusations so that people think he's Tom Jones or Rod Stewart, then a certain irreducible number of women are going to act batty around him."

By acting "batty" he meant making up stories about a sexual relationship with the president, as at the time it was being hinted Miss Lewinsky had done. Needless to say, this was before Clinton was driven to confess that the allegations about his behavior, more goatish than ape-like, were all true. But Lyons's point doubtless did not depend on the actual falseness of the "smears and false accusations." On the contrary, it was strengthened, as many subsequent feminist commentators implicitly recognized when they took up the comparison with the same end in view. Not the least odd thing about the whole Lewinsky business was the spectacle of feminists rushing forward to affirm that, as in the animal kingdom, it should be regarded as the privilege of a putative human alpha male to engage in coitus with the unattached females of the pack. Or troop.

Not that they did so with any scientific

authority. As Rebecca Mead wrote in *The New Yorker* about this latest outburst of amateur ethology, “psychobabble’s out; bio-babble’s in.”

The trouble with grade-school animal behaviorism [she wrote] of the kind Wolf tossed at Gore, it turns out, is that, scientifically speaking, the alpha male is not all he has been cracked up to be, and probably isn’t whom you want leading your country anyway. According to Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, a distinguished primatologist and the author of the recently published book *Mother Nature*, the popular notion of the alpha male as the ape who gets to have sex with all the females and swagger past all the other males is something of a myth, a projection of the hopes and wishes of evolutionary biologists—who, at least in the early days of the science, were mostly elite males. “The male hope is that there is one ‘best male,’” Hrdy said the other day. “And, of course, in the back of his mind, there is always the fantasy ‘It’s me.’”

That last is a typical feminist put-down (You’re so vain!), but we shouldn’t forget that those women who gathered at the now-famous *New York Observer* dinner at Le Bernardin in early 1998 to discuss the Lewinsky affair did so largely in terms of the president’s personal attractiveness. Feminist philosophers from Erica Jong to Elizabeth Benedict to Nancy Friday to Nicole Miller agreed that Clinton was hot—that, in short, It’s him. “This virile president is suddenly fulfilling this forbidden fantasy of this old-fashioned taboo aggressive male. I think women are finding that appealing,” said Katie Roiphe. Patricia Marx, a former writer for “Saturday Night Live,” put it more directly: “All my women friends and I would be happy to have sex with Clinton and not talk about it.”

If such charming female members of the human troop feel this way, perhaps the “alpha male” is not quite so mythic or ideological a character after all. At any rate, the sudden prominence of Miss Wolf in our national life seems to suggest that we shall

find it henceforth impossible to elect a president until we have consulted with the likes of her as to whether he is sexually desirable and, hence, “alpha” enough. Perhaps this regrettable tendency is a kind of feminist revenge upon the electorate for electing so many men to high office. If they are to be ruled by men, at least the feminists of the media can confer upon themselves the enjoyable privilege of occasionally treating those men as Hollywood producers might treat a bevy of young starlets auditioning for a part.

But it is also true that traditional views of male-female differences, some of which can be documented as having survived into this century, found it natural to associate femininity with the animal side of human nature, masculinity with the spiritual. Aristotle classed women with children and slaves as possessing the virtues of submission, not of command, and the Christian and ascetic tradition is shot through with references to women as temptations to men’s lower nature and obstacles to their communion with higher things. As Katharine M. Rogers wrote in *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (1966), “the idea that women are animals hostile to man’s idealism” is a natural outgrowth of the “patriarchal tradition” of regarding woman as “a creature weak in mind and morals who must be kept in check if society is to survive and man to progress.”

Surely no one believes such seeming nonsense today? And yet an honest feminist would have to admit that among the many wonderful consequences of women’s suffrage over the last eighty years, the most recent to come to our attention is Naomi Wolf’s somewhat less than wonderful speculation as to the vice president’s sexual desirability among America’s fabled “soccer moms.” It is at least arguable, is it not, that this kind of sexual politics is rather a derogation from “man’s idealism,” even if it is not to be considered actively hostile to it? Could it be that the opponents of Mrs. Stanton and Miss Anthony in their long and

inspiring struggle for the vote had *something* to say that might still be worth listening to?

If they did, you wouldn't know it from Mr. Burns's treatment of the subject, which is in a style now as recognizable as anything on television. Coleridge once said of some lines of Wordsworth that if he had encountered them running wild in the desert, he should have known them at once as having sprung from the pen of his friend. In the same way, it is impossible for anyone to mistake that slowly moving camera circling around old, sepia-toned photographs while mournful violin and piano arrangements of hymn tunes and popular and patriotic songs of the last century accompany a lugubrious narration. The narration on this occasion was by Sally Kellerman, whose most distinguished role in an otherwise less-than-distinguished acting career was as Major Hot Lips Houlihan in Robert Altman's *M*A*S*H*. She is also remembered for baring her breasts at an Academy Awards Ceremony.

Obviously, the Burnsian style, even with such a mouthpiece, is not suited to controversy, though controversy there was in plenty about the lives of his heroines. As a result, we have the sense of a stereophonic presentation with only one channel working. Again and again we are asked to admire the struggles of Mrs. Stanton and Miss Anthony without ever being told what, precisely, they were struggling against. True, we are told (by one of the centenarian suffragettes, interviews with whom begin the show) that in the bad old days, "Women were in the kitchen, in the home; men did the voting." But there is no hint as to what obstacle there might have been during the first 133 years of the republic (to say nothing of the other nations, numbering no less than all of them in which there was any voting, in which such disfranchisement was also the case) to the remedying of so obvious an injustice.

The nearest we get to an adumbration of the opposition's case is a mention of something called "The Cult of True Womanhood," which is erroneously described as

"the ideology of that era." An ideology, however, is to be distinguished from an *ex post facto* justification of traditional behavior whose true origins are lost in the mists of time. No nineteenth-century ideologue persuaded contemporary males to be mean to women and deny them the ballot. It was taken for granted by all and sundry, not least by women themselves, that public affairs were the province of men and not women. By the time that this assumption became in any sense an "ideology," its days were already numbered. Thus it is in a way appropriate that the only explanation of "The Cult of True Womanhood" in Burns's film comes in Susan B. Anthony's scathing dismissal of it: "The old idea that man was made for himself and woman for him, that he is the oak, she the vine, he the head, she the heart, he the great conservator of thought, she of love, will be reverently laid aside with other long-since exploded philosophies of the ignorant past."

Actually, there is a subtle misrepresentation of "the old idea" here. No one ever said that man was made for himself, or at least no one who based the subordination of women on biblical authority. Man was made the servant of a Higher Power. As Milton put it, "He for God; she for God in him." How this "philosophy" could be "exploded," as if it were a scientific theory which was found no longer to fit the available facts, is never explained. Either you believe as Milton believed—as, in fact, nearly everybody we know of in all of human history up until the last century believed—or as Miss Anthony did, whose view has held sway almost since her death in 1906. But both are professions of belief and not of knowledge. Why we exchanged one belief for the other is a question that might have been, even on television, of absorbing interest, but it is of no interest to Ken Burns, nor to any of the panel of female historians (he says there are no men who know this history) he consulted.

This is because Burns is not really interested in history itself. As Christine Stansell wrote in *The New Republic*,

the obdurate nature of the history—everything about these truculent women and their truculent ideas, everything that aroused so much fury and so much passion—has faded into the autumnal tones of a past that will give trouble to nobody. . . . In a word, Burns seduces; and the name for his seduction is nostalgia. He is in the nostalgia business. His films are winning and (as they used to say) educational, but finally they are the historiographical equivalent of Restoration Hardware.

But this is to give Burns rather less than his due. A production like “Not For Ourselves Alone” is more than just nostalgia; it is mythmaking in the fashion and in the medium of our times. The better comparison of such a reverential history of the prevailing progressive view is with Parson Weems’s life of George Washington. It is certainly likely to be known by quite as many schoolchildren too.

Well, well, all ages need their myths. But the wide promulgation of this one is a pity in one sense because it makes the feminism of Miss Wolf rather a mystery to us. Her appearance on “This Week,” for instance, must have been almost incomprehensible to a great many viewers accustomed to a hagiographical approach to the female elector. True, she did her best to look sober and serious. Like Monica Lewinsky in her interview with Barbara Walters last spring, she had her flowing mane of thick, dark hair pulled back into a much more demure, even severe-looking, style than we were accustomed to. Nor, alas, was her hair all that she had in common with Magnificent Monica. Here, for example, is how she replied to Cokie Roberts’s question: “What about those three things? His clothes, his alpha beta-ness, and the money?”

Gosh, where do I begin? There’s been a lot that’s been not correct in the reports over the last week. And as I was saying earlier in the Green Room, as a citizen, I guess, I’m mostly disappointed. Because I think the American people are much more focused on—if they knew the substance of the reason I’m at the

table of the Gore campaign, they’d be pleased and interested and glad to know, because they’re the substance of what American families are concerned about.

Everything from the wage gap that women face, to how to make a better balance between work and family. But two of the points you raised that have been distorted in the press: alpha beta, taken out of context. I was making a random point in passing—well not a random, but a common point, that any vice president is in a supporting role, meaning he’s supporting someone else’s agenda, obviously. And any presidential candidate is in an initiatory role. Rolling out his own vision and agenda for the country, which is what Al Gore was doing.

It was an obvious political point that pundits had been making for months. And it’s unfortunate that there’s been a misinterpretation. And I’m glad to set the record straight.

The rest of the interview is of a similar level of subtlety and thought. It would be tempting to think that such stunning inarticulacy as this was owing to the unwonted constraints on her hair cutting off the blood supply to her brain, but the evidence from Miss Wolf’s writing is overwhelming that this is the true, the native Wolf-note wild. In fact, she is said to have come to Mr. Gore’s attention in the first place because of something she wrote in *George* magazine in June 1998, an article advising the vice president to “let his defenses down and allow his inner oddness out.” This he may seem to have done merely by hiring her, since her suggestion to him of a winning strategy was to adopt the unashamed and triumphant one-worldism that she sees as the ineluctable wave of the future:

A recent ad for Benetton [she wrote], the global fashion corporation, shows four attractive young people of suitably diverse ethnicity—from, say, Cameroon, Korea, Finland and Niger—with a paraphrase of the “All men are created equal” language of the Declaration of Independence. The secret of a successful Campaign 2000 for Gore lies in that ad.

Although this is a desperately silly statement, a perfect illustration of why Camille Paglia said on a rival talk show the same morning that Miss Wolf is a “kind of *Seventeen* magazine level of thinker,” it is little if any sillier than the level at which national political campaigns, presumably designed with people like Miss Wolf in mind, are conducted these days. Gore, after all, has won national office twice on the ticket with Clinton, and he presumably picked Miss Wolf for his team in order to be supplied with just such ineffable nonsense. Before him, Dick Morris picked her to advise him on Clinton’s campaign in 1996—when she advised him to make the president look like “the Good Father.”

That this advice was followed must hardly need saying. And having established that the voters were to be treated like children by Clinton, she was subsequently picked up to supply some suitably childish thinking for Gore. Like Ken Burns, Naomi Wolf is not just an advocate of childish thinking; she has a child’s view of the world. There are the good people (Gore, the suffragettes) and the bad people (Republicans); the good people are always right, if somewhat ahead of their time, and the bad people are always wrong. There are no serious differences in politics because the path of progress (visible to those who can “see beyond the horizon” as she says Gore

can) is already mapped out for us, whether to women’s suffrage or to one-world government. Opposition to these things is therefore *ipso facto* wrong and vicious, and those who oppose them must be deemed capable of any enormity.

Somehow, though Burns forbears to remind us of it, one cannot quite forget that those old anti-suffragists used to argue that women were to be debarred from participation in government, except as adjuncts of their fathers, husbands, or sons, on the grounds that they were weak-minded and childish. That was why, like children, they had to be guarded and protected and insulated from the world’s harsher realities while men were left to do the hard work of wielding power. It also used to be said, of course, that insofar as this was true it was because women *had been* cossetted, treated like children, and denied the right to train themselves up to grown-up affairs. But now we have in Naomi Wolf a proud young feminist at the heart of political power in this country, a Yale graduate and former Rhodes Scholar who has obviously never been protected from acquiring an unseemly knowledge of the way this world works—and she thinks exactly like a child.

Could it be that it is time for us men to reconsider the spirit of injudicious generosity in which eighty years ago we gave women the vote?

No mercy

by William Logan

If you want to know what it's like for Sharon Olds to menstruate, or squeeze her oil-filled pores, or discover her naked father shitting, *Blood, Tin, Straw*¹ will tell you. If you want to know what her sex life is like (it's *wonderful*, trust her!), she'll tell you, and tell you in prurient, anatomical detail the Greek philosophers would have killed for—she's the empirical queen of lovemaking, of every secret session of the body.

If I could change one physical thing
about myself, I would retract those tiny
twilit lips which appeared at the mouth
of my body when the children's heads pressed
out, I would

haul back up into heaven those little
ladder-tatters, although in the crush
between the babies' skull-plates and the skin
of the birth-gates, I wanted the symphysis
more cherished—and he seems to like those
bruised

celestial wattles, their clasp, their tip-of-
seraph-pinion purple. They are
the last licks that the other world took,
crown to sole, along each darling,
he kisses a god's small tongues in them
and they soul-kiss him back.

Aristotle would have loved her metaphors,
her anatomy lessons (and how he would
have delighted in *symplysis*). I should have

¹ *Blood, Tin, Straw*, by Sharon Olds; Alfred A. Knopf,
125 pages, \$24, \$15 paper.

stopped quoting after half-a-dozen lines; but part of the hypnotic fascination of Olds's poetry is its headlong, hell-for-leather hubris—you never know what's coming next, but you're sure it's going to be a disaster. She may start a poem complaining about her labia, but, before she's through, her womb is heaven and her husband's French-kissing her god-tongues. (You'd think the god's small tongue would be the clitoris. How lucky of Olds to have more than one.)

Readers now thumb through Olds to get to the good parts, as teenagers a generation ago furtively paged through their parents' copy of *Peyton Place*. She trades in shameless prose chopped up into lines of poetry, lurid as a tabloid, returning to the primal scene more often than a therapist: her cold, sadistic father; her cold, masochistic mother; the chair her parents tied her to; the birth of her children; her nipples; and always, always, her marriage bed. If someone is raped in her apartment building, we never hear about the victim. We're told instead about Olds having sex the next day:

The day after we heard about it,
we made love, in the morning, he entered
me
and I thought, *It's not so bad*, I could hardly
feel anything,
just something hard going in and out of me
somewhere far away down my body
like something seen from a distance, an

ocean liner
going down twenty miles away.

An *ocean liner*? For sheer tastelessness Olds can scarcely be bettered. The premise may be some poor woman's rape, but the conclusion's all *Sharon, Sharon, Sharon!* A poet less selfish would have written about selfishness, about the inability to empathize, but Olds can barely get out of bed, can manage only extraneous thoughts about the rapist, "sealed and unfruitful." When elsewhere she revisits the rape and murder of a grade-school classmate, a sickening incident from her first book, *Satan Says* (1980), the poem's still mostly about Sharon Olds.

Misapplication of intensity is her cardinal vice: everywhere brute shock is taken as a sign of honesty (shock eventually makes the reader shockproof); finally it becomes just a form of self-promotion. Olds has as many teases as a strip show, and the psychology that drives her poetry is dourly exhibitionist: that is, a form of punishment and abasement. "Look at me! Look at me!" the poems say, poems of someone never loved enough. She'll imagine her corpse rotting underground ("my face sluicing off me,/ my Calvinist lips blooming little/ broccolis"), or the last moments of the astronaut Christa McAuliffe ("as if God touched/ her brain with a thumb and it went out, like a mercy killing"), or the screams of a napalmed Vietnamese girl in a famous news photograph. She loves to rub your nose in it: if you look away, you're a coward; if you keep looking, you're complicit.

Olds is sometimes mistaken for a confessional poet, but she has nothing to confess: she never feels anything as subtle or scouring as guilt, and it's hard to believe she'd recognize a sin if it bit her. Her poems are striking, thorough, vivid as a bullet wound, and written without taste or depth. She flaunts the crimes against her childhood until they become rubbed-over morality tales. Don't think too long about a little girl deprived of love who's now an exhibitionist, who wants "to be/ fucked blind, pummelled half dead with it."

And sexual love, what if it
is mostly sex, the cunt wanting
to swallow, swallow, fiercely sing all
day all night, what if I'm a selfish
fucker feeding on his pleasure.

Poetry in our prudent hour needs more sex, not less, and Olds may someday become the laureate of the bedroom; but for all her radical pretense (she claims if she hadn't married she'd have been a Weatherman bomber), she's a homely *Redbook* moralist, believing in motherhood, family, and honey on her nipples. By the time she's reduced to giving sex tips, or calling her husband's member "the errless digit," all her shallow pretense is greedily on display. The sadism is safe, but de Sade would have run screaming from her bedroom.

Glyn Maxwell is one of the young Turks of British poetry. He whooped onto the scene less than a decade ago, all twitchy invention and Audenesque manner, making more noise than a wrecking crew. To the mild, sleepy ambitions of Nineties British poetry (which often seemed devoted to building a better mousetrap, one too small for a mouse), the *sprezzatura* of his verse was a rude surprise. The brashness of his early books makes more impressive the maturity and gathered power of *The Breakage*,² the first of his books to be published in America.

The slyly reserved, good-natured poems in *The Breakage* don't make a lot of fuss. They know their job of work and set out to finish it, but they're often slightly private affairs, as if they weren't all that keen on letting you know where they're going. Their simplicity of diction and slightly bewildered, even childlike speakers are deceptive. Much of the book is haunted by World War I, for poetry the most defining conflict since the French Revolution. The horrors of the war were no more horrible, though more sustained and grinding, than those of our

² *The Breakage*, by Glyn Maxwell; Houghton Mifflin, 81 pages, \$22.

Civil War. Thomas and Owen learned their realism in the trenches; out of the trenches, the prewar decadence of Imagism and *vers libre*—which reek of French cafés and absinthe, and might have lost their way in smoky aestheticism—was annealed into the harsh psychologies of modernism.

The war has continued to trouble British poetry, most brutally in the poems of Geoffrey Hill. (In British and American poetry World War II scarcely exists, not a denial of the death camps as much as mute acknowledgment of their moral silencing.) To Maxwell's generation, World War I was the war of grandfathers and great-grandfathers, but its losses still scar the landscape of village and family.

Valentines at the Front

Valentine's Day anywhere the boys are,
Grouped around the sack that might as well be
Kicking like a caught thing, like a prisoner,
They sort it out so rapidly, then slowly.

They lean back amazed, then not at all amazed
At tissues ringed and arrowed to them. Plainly
This pattered here from home like a dim beast
Only the English feed. It would never guess

There is no place like home, and in home's
place
Are these who sit befuddled in a fosse,
Crumpling the colour white and the colour
pink
Away like news of some far Allied loss

That's one too many. Now they can only
think
It's rained so long the past has burst its sides
And spilled into the future in the ink
Of untold villages of untold brides.

It hardly registers at first that the sack is a mailsack, the boys are soldiers handing out letters that turn out to be Valentines. The tissue romantic sentiments look ridiculous amid the mud (and aren't the crumpled white and pink like wounded flesh?), then not so ridiculous, if home is what you fight

to return to. There won't be many grooms demobbing in those villages of would-be brides (and *untold* trembles with the ambiguity of number, of ignorance).

In his early poems Maxwell couldn't bear not to be clever, and they often became mere foolery (a phrase like "befuddled in a fosse" is a reminder of the little stings his tongue likes to inflict). Now their drollery has a darker cast: he allows these poems to seem slight, airy nothings, then gradually turns up the pressure. A giddy Georgian holiday—a child's view of everything that prevents his family from making an excursion to the seaside—ends with a waltz that turns to shellfire. Maxwell hears the seashell in *shellfire*, knows what battles are commemorated in taking a cab round Trafalgar Square, trying to catch a train at Waterloo Station. A tender sequence of letters to Edward Thomas starts in jest, squibs written by friends surprised not to find him in his cottage (it's not clear if he's not in his cottage because he's at the front); it starts in jest but ends in elegy.

Maxwell writes in a meter sometimes like rough carpentry, a language often homely and well-worn. Educated at Oxford, that hothouse of British cleverness (where John Fuller has encouraged young poets for thirty years or more), but also at Boston University under Derek Walcott, Maxwell has taken his influences broadly, stolen shamelessly—in his early poems you were constantly running into IOUs to Frost, or Larkin, or Auden. His *Moon Country* (1996), written with another young Turk, Simon Armitage, attempted to recapture the road-movie bonhomie of *Letters from Iceland*, but the young Turks were more Hope and Crosby than Auden and Isherwood.

In *The Breakage* Maxwell has paid back his debts, acknowledging what he owes, and gloriously become like no one but himself. At times he seems a throwback to a more old-fashioned style of poem-making: he's sacrificed high spirits (well, not all his high spirits) for a barrister's solidity. The poems are often a little aloof, half warning

the reader away—it's hard not to read them twice, and hard to understand them until you read them twice. There are still mistakes (an homage to Frost is ruined when the last stanza descends into the dopey patois of "I woulda jogged forever if I coulda"), but Maxwell has learned to do what all good poets do—he makes a world fresh again, a world you never knew existed.

Philip Levine's *The Mercy*³ reminds me of those peeling WPA murals that still sometimes adorn post office lobbies. Muscled young men and strapping young women stride nobly across the fields and through the factories of America, doing noble work (they have the physiques of professional wrestlers and expressions to match). There is a whiff of Stalinism about them, of muscles equal to moral virtue (it was one of those periods when health didn't make wealth, it made art), of blind faith in soil, and hard work, and square dealing, and labor unions.

Levine was raised in Depression-era Detroit, a city of the heart he has memorialized ever since. He has a rich fantasy life devoted to serving in the Spanish Civil War (at the end of which he'd have been all of eleven), and to meeting, or almost meeting, or wishing he had met, poets like Lorca, Pavese, Vallejo. At best he captures the spirit of a lost past where boys went looking for girls at Young Communists meetings:

I'll spare you the argument
with the one decent girl who called Reuther
a little fascist, the turn-table that ground out
"Petrushka" over and over with a will
of its own, the posters for Henry Wallace,
the plywood square for dancing where two
girls
in chinos and sweaters frowned under a bare
bulb,
the brick and board bookcase and its virgin
copies
of *Das Kapital* and Jack London's novels.

³ *The Mercy*, by Philip Levine; Alfred A. Knopf, 81 pages, \$22.

All the desire sublimated by Old Left politics is there, down to the virgins, if they are virgins, slouching near the virgin books. Levine has become our mortal sentimentalist, wringing his hands over immigrant life, factory work, dulled and stunted dreams, as if the lives were their own virtue, as if all a poet had to do were strip naked and go around shouting, "I am *human*. I have *feelings*."

A lot of poets want to offer up the lives and leave the art to look after itself; and on occasion a stray incident, an accidental phrase, *is* enough by itself. Here an uncle speaks:

"It was the beginning of autumn,
the little noiseless Asian rains poured
their waters down on us until we
slept on duty in our wet uniforms
leaning into each other like kittens.
A man alone would walk off the road
into an open field to find his sleep."

This starts like "poetry" (no uncle ever really spoke this way), but then something happens: *leaning into each other like kittens!* The exhausted soldiers aren't as innocent or safe as kittens, but you wish they were and they must wish they were (and for a moment, in the image, they are). The comforts of the domestic world are almost a rebuke, but they rise with a measure of longing. You never know when poetry is going to take over from "poetry," and even the poet himself may not know. Alas, Levine never seems to realize that such a phrase creates a world invulnerable to the malformations of emotion, so he goes on squeezing the poem for tears; and eventually he gets them, even if they're only his own.

Levine was a tough guy in verse, once, and a pretty funny tough guy. Readers who know only the poems of his middle and old age should look back at the books of the Sixties and early Seventies. For more than two decades he has labored in his mawkish wallow, ransacking his muddy version of Americana for out-of-the-mud transcendence.

Do you know how to read the wind? Do you?
It's easy. Just close your eyes and listen.
Of course you have to be old, broken
in body and spirit, brought down so low—
as Lungo was—that even words make sense.

Levine is an old, accomplished artisan. You trust the leathery tone, the rueful air, the sly jokes at his own expense. He long ago learned how to shape a sentence, and sometimes you can almost see him measure one by eye and plane it with his hands. I once saw a glassblower in Venice with such hands. He took the glaring bulb of glass from the furnace with his glassblower's pipe, and blew it and shaped it as it glowed. At each step it was a thing of extraordinary beauty, a bow toward the antique arts. In the end he gave a deft twist, a knowing knock, then held it out—and *Ecco!*, it was an ashtray.

Poetry is the easiest of the arts, next to painting. Any fool can write poetry, and many fools do. You just look into your heart, and write—and mostly what you write are lines that bring tears to the eyes of wives, or mothers, or poetry critics (or husbands, fathers, and poetry critics). When a non-poet writes poetry, generally you get the conventions of a century ago, or sentiment so crippled even the greeting-card industry would turn up its nose. But a non-poet isn't bound to the tacit conventions of contemporary verse. Not knowing the rules, he doesn't mind breaking the rules, and poetry only advances when the unwritten rules are broken.

David Mamet's secret life as a poet might have borrowed the splintered rhythms that made *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Oleanna* studies in vernacular corruption and betrayal. The language of the stage and the language of poetry were once the same language, because they studied the same rhythms: poetry hasn't recovered since plays abandoned pentameter and took to prose. Romantics persist in believing the true language of poetry is Wordsworth's "real language of men," which has been

Mamet's stock in trade, but Wordsworth's real language was still the rough trade of pentameter.

You can be mediocre in any number of genres, but a genius only in one—the exceptions are few. When a distinguished playwright publishes his verses, therefore, a betting man roots for them but bets against them. Alas, the poems in *The Chinaman*⁴ are grotesque, unlovely things that look as if they'd been abandoned at an orphanage and rejected by the orphanage, too.

We turned back, as who could then not,
To a snapped rotten snap which kept the
skater on the bank
Til cries of men who rushed the ladder to the
pond
When whose son disappeared.
With folly to shore up
The afternoon
If that well of self-pity announced itself
deplete.

It's hard to know how to untangle these sentences, if they are sentences: the words seem to have fallen out of a Shake 'N Bake bag. Mamet's all too eager to show off his fustian, preposterous diction, a freshman's dream of what philosophers sound like:

When we await the Moshiach
And less-though-cognate sublunary aid
We line our wrongs into a cadenced march
As if each wrenching turn for the worse
Could not but appeal
To the theatrical sense
Of that-which-knows-we suffer
And create desire for resolution.

"That-which-knows-we suffer" might be God, but by then who cares? When you read Mamet you realize how difficult it is, even for a man of taste and reading (and considerable self-opinion), to write a good line. He can pretend to know what he's doing, because pretense is a gesture of the

⁴ *The Chinaman*, by David Mamet; Overlook Press, 72 pages, \$19.95.

stage, without ever realizing the comic hash he's made of his emotions.

I thought I knew
What love was
Before I met you
But I did not know.

Many years have passed
In the pineapple bed.
Clothes mended and torn
Four times we saw them paint
The music room.
Children were born.
We moved toward
Converse with the noble dead.

The noble dead! Just the right sententious note. Mamet must have written these things all on his own, because he had no help from an editor. The punctuation comes and goes (mostly the syntax just goes); there are two-dollar words in ten-cent sentences (and words like “anappositeness” and “Mamleuke” that must be typos—though shouldn’t Mamet have noticed the persistent misspelling of *Glenngarry Glen Ross*?), capital letters scattered with abandon, and occasionally a shorthand that has lost contact with the outside world (like Stanley groping his way toward Livingston):

To puff the spirits of that day,
and anomic by talisman.

The puissant Boulder Purey.
Boats in a green shed, that polio summer,
when they winched the behemoth
submersible
athwart the Outer Drive,
boys lured in cars became dead
in the waste space a courtesy title had as
the Bird Sanctuary.

You want to quote and quote until the tears start. Not all the poetry is as bad as this; some is much more embarrassing. (I haven’t the heart to quote the silly, racist title poem.) A playwright lives by his ear: he must present the simulacra of conversation,

what we believe conversation to be, with its tensions and fraught meanings, its Freudian mistakes, Empsonian ambiguities, Pavlovian repetitions. A good playwright writes close to the edge of accident, while understanding the stagecraft passed down from one generation of playwrights to another—how to manage an exit, when to double a part, what advantages come from stripping the stage of scenery. Some of the craft a poet knows is just as important, as these poems so naked of craft plainly show. The good news is, Mamet isn’t giving up playwriting for poetry. The bad news is, Harold Pinter also writes poems, and they’re *worse*.

Joe Bolton killed himself in 1990 at the age of twenty-eight. *The Last Nostalgia*,⁵ his collected poems, comes with the particular taint and grace to which the books of suicides are susceptible. Even to mention his death in the first sentence of a review is to succumb to a romance never romantic to those who have to clean up afterwards. If I choose to review a man who was once my student, I break a rule because his posthumous reputation does him no good, and because these poems are astonishing in their delicate, rueful agonies—boyish, romantic poems with a long, bruised perspective. He wrote the poems Raymond Carver’s characters would write if they could write poetry. (They’re the poems Raymond Carver would have written if he could have written poetry.)

Like most young poets, Bolton found poetry a form for repetitive anxieties, a lyric bulwark against the narrative his life threatened to become—a run of broken romances punctuated by divorce. He was born in Kentucky and raised in the Jackson Purchase, the son of schoolteachers. He drifted from writing program to writing program, one of the faceless mass of migrant young poets—proud, nervous, a young man rawboned and whiskey-voiced,

⁵ *The Last Nostalgia: Poems 1982–1990*, by Joe Bolton, edited by Donald Justice; University of Arkansas Press, 206 pages, \$24 paper.

a chain-smoker who looked prematurely worn out. Outside his narrow influences, he didn't have much room to absorb poetry, so the intensity and finish of his verse are marked by sometimes grinding repetition —there are times when you think if he wakes up in one more motel room with one more girl, you'll kill him yourself. But he's capable of scenes that make the fraught circumstances of life into the framing instances of art.

On the Square

It could be any Southern town you care to
name:
Bank, diner, hardware store, lone traffic light.
Saturdays, you come to buy everything
That can't be grown, contrived, or done
without.
Old men sit spitting on the courthouse steps.
A boy in a Camaro squeals, once, his wide
new tires.
Women test their reflections in the windows
of the shops
They pass, hoping to find some lost beauty
restored.

And when those eyes, for a moment, hold
yours, they seem
To hold some insolence. You think they
think you
Are guilty of some crime beyond the crime
All are guilty of. And oh, my dear, they do!
And so do you.

The special, fierce confidence of this, the scene exactly controlled until it can be released into the symbolic realm (he handles rhythm as if it were psychology), shows how closely he studied what models he had, studied them until he could turn them into himself. He was drawn to Baudelaire and Vallejo, whose poems he imitated and transformed, and to those haggard Americans of pastoral loneliness, James Wright and Richard Hugo. In delicate syntax and lush adjective, however, in the slight hesitation between act and judgment (how easily the longings of these lines turn to mild accusa-

tion), he was a student of his teacher Donald Justice, who has edited these poems and given them fond, acute introduction.

Bolton had a restless imagination, capable of the sly tensions of free verse, but longing for the restraints of form (his sonnets make most New Formalist poems look dogged and academic). His easygoing, unaffected style slips from the details of this affair, that town, into losses nearly heartbreaking. He finds

Some pulsing rhythm among the soft globes
Of the streetlamps, and something hopelessly
Romantic in the way the points of palms

Aspire to a sky already fading.
(It is only the legend of your youth
Lost to all the real things you learned to love.)

Fifty miles away, the Gulf of Mexico
Teases the nostrils, rousing a desire
Bacardi and cigarettes cannot cure,

And which no well-intentioned lover
Can fulfill wholly or for long. It is
Always yourself again, left all alone

At evening's end, strolling down the same
street
You knew the dead end to by heart in
childhood,
But somehow lovelier than you remembered...

—Especially at this late hour when, to the
west,
The twilight plays the game it loves to lose
And loses, over and over, to its dark sea.

These lines were for Hart Crane, and are typical of Bolton's modesty (and obsession with early death), a modesty that sometimes faltered toward romantic self-pity. He lets the revelations come quietly, if they come at all—patient, sometimes dangerously close to being a voyeur, he was a poet who loved the old routines and was daring enough to try to pull them off. I don't know any young poet who had his lack of vanity. The lulling, hypnotic rhythms are more uneasy than they seem.

Florida Twilight, 1905
(St. Augustine)

Returning late, the flushed West to the right,
One saw, aligned against the golden sky
(The very throne-robe of the star-crowned
night),
Black palms, a frieze of chiseled ebony.
And even at the moment one resolved
Not to come back, the scent of fruit and
flowers
Brought on a sadness as the past dissolved:
Arcades, courts, arches, fountains, lordly
towers. . . .

The shore of sunset and the palms,
meanwhile—
Late shade giving over to greater shade—
What were they? With what did they have to
do?
It was like myriad pictures of the Nile,
But with a History yet to be made,
A world already lost that was still new.

Bolton has stolen some of these phrases from Henry James's *The American Scene*, in conscious imitation of a lovely sonnet by Justice (I have taken a liberty by correcting a typo here). This was the close act of attention he offered, to read James through Justice and Justice through James until he knew how to control, and how to create through control, the "nostalgic rage," as James called it.

These seductive poems, often voluptuous with emotion, have a guarded, gloomy purity, wounding themselves into excess. They had so many possible ways of going wrong, it's breathtaking how often their flirtation with the mysterious went right. The phrases elsewhere are remarkably plain, scrubbed of adjective: his quieter effects take time to develop and are therefore harder to quote to advantage. Bolton was never fully formed, a poet still surprising to himself: he wrote compulsively, and at times his poems inhabit a claustrophobic

world like Hardy's, their sorrows and disorders repeated in terrified order. As his editor notes, there is little development or change—there is even, perhaps, a decline toward the end.

Bolton shot himself the day after turning in his master's thesis, which may have seemed an end of sorts. Before his death he announced to a friend that he had given up poetry. He published one private-press book before he died; a posthumous volume, *Days of Summer Gone* (1990), was not widely noticed. *The Last Nostalgia* is essentially that master's thesis, which included his two books and two other manuscripts. Justice has added two dozen uncollected poems.

An early death, a poet's early death, informs all the poems written. A fatal accident is an act of fate, but suicide is an act of will and therefore can be seen as an artist's gesture, the flourish with which the work is signed, the lethal autograph that announces the work is finished. Sylvia Plath is the most famous example of the suicide's Faustian bargain—you achieve the fame you long for, but aren't around to enjoy it; your poems may be read by millions, but always through the distorting lens of your death. Yet often death is what the poems tried to forestall—in his poems the poet uses up his life until he has nothing left. Suicide often seems to follow the last kenosis or emptying out of imagination.

Bolton wrote the poems life would allow, poems with a thrilling sense of death postponed. They are brutal, lonely poems, stark with erotic longing, but tender in their submission to loss. His love affairs seem transient, and there is nothing in them beyond the physical—"we" and "us" must be his rarest pronouns. It is disturbing to think what he might have written, had he hated himself a little less and lived a little longer. I may be forgiven for valuing him highly now, when I feel that once I undervalued him.

Unlimited nastiness

by David Pryce-Jones

Considered in his lifetime one of the world's foremost authorities on international affairs, E. H. Carr today has a special claim to attention: he was consistently and egregiously wrong. First a defender of Nazi Germany, he evolved with no change of pace into a hardline Communist fellow-traveller. The Soviet Union, he held, was the model society of the future. At a time when it mattered, he ceaselessly lectured and broadcast, and taught and wrote, and all in defence of totalitarianism. It was a feat of sorts to campaign over years in most of the major outlets, above all *The Times*, in favor of appeasing Nazism and Communism. In their heyday, neither Hitler nor Stalin could do anything to cause him the least twinge of moral disquiet. This sinister man did more than his fair share to mislead public opinion.

According to Jonathan Haslam,¹ it all goes back to childhood, to an unambitious father and a timid mother, both of them "middle middle class, and very Victorian." A spinster aunt dominated the household. Emotion, it seems, made the young Carr feel so ill that he learnt to take his distance from other people and life itself, to evolve into a natural scholarship boy. At Cambridge, he was a classicist, a sometime student of A. E. Housman, and the shade of that gloomy master of repression and pedantry seems to envelop Carr. With a

brusque dismissive manner, his eyes pin-pointed behind clerkly spectacles on a narrow and humorless face, Carr at any rate became one of the "cold radiator types" whom Cyril Connolly believed to be a speciality of Cambridge.

Rheumatic fever unfitted him for military service in 1914, and he was recruited instead on a temporary basis into the Foreign Office. There he seems to have acquired the mindset that officialdom has supremacy over the political process, and that its paper deposits contain all that needs to be known. Carr was one among eighteen officials on the British delegation to the Versailles conference in 1919. Allied treatment of Germany and the intervention on the side of the Whites in the Russian civil war soon hardened an essential conviction that his own country could do no right. The one and only fixed point in his outlook was that he knew best.

Soon he was posted as a secretary to the British legation in Riga. One of Haslam's themes is that Carr craved love and affection, but if so he set about obtaining them in strange ways. Anne, his first wife, accompanied him to Riga. Eight years older than Carr, the mother of three children, she had only been free to marry Carr when her previous husband committed suicide.

Domestic life rapidly bored Carr, and so did Riga. First-hand experience of a small state victimized by aggressive neighbors only encouraged his belief in power. Visit-

¹ *The Vices of Integrity: E. H. Carr 1892-1982*, by Jonathan Haslam; Verso, 306 pages, \$35.

ing Moscow, learning Russian, taking up Dostoevsky, Bakunin, and Marx, he edged his way out of the Foreign Office into academic life. When a chair fell vacant in the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth, he was chosen over other applicants including Herbert Butterfield and the eminent historian of Hungary, C. A. Macartney.

Another of Haslam's themes is that Carr is to be explained as an old-fashioned liberal who went astray, decayed, and exploded. However ill-defined, a concept of progress was at the core of Victorian liberalism. For Carr, as for many between the wars, this shifted and enlarged into a sentimental fantasy of revolution, complete with flag-waving and leaders haranguing jubilant crowds in public arenas, thus making order out of chaos. The abandonment of liberalism, Haslam writes, left Carr without firm moral foundations, imagining that he was catching the tide of history. Capitalism and democracy were doomed. The individual had to belong to the collective. In the grip of such illusion, innumerable men and women betrayed the very values which protected their own liberties and rights, certain in themselves that the totalitarian ends either of Nazism or Communism justified the means. Carr is a supreme example, but quite how an essentially irrational and amoral reaction could be mistaken for an intellectual process is one of the central mysteries of that period.

Nazism was a first example to Carr of revolution as progress. Hitler offered a creed embracing all Germans and restoring their national pride. He was consummating the work begun by Marx of overthrowing capitalism. Posterity would regard Hitler, Carr wrote in 1933, as "its most characteristic and striking figure." Hitler's various aggressions were justified. The victims were beneath notice. The Munich Agreement was a model for negotiating peaceful change. As late as October 1939, in a lecture at Chatham House, the foreign affairs think tank in London, he unfavorably compared Russia to Germany, "which was almost a free

country." That same month, though, he was also writing that Stalin possessed a gift for politics which "amounts to genius."

The war came as a shock, he later confessed, which "numbed the thinking process." Others who had enthused about Hitler and Nazism recanted, and usually they had the decency to stay silent for a spell. Not Carr. The moment the Soviet Union attacked and incorporated the Baltic states—whose aspirations for independence he knew first-hand—he was writing, "this is a better alternative than absorption in a new Nazi Europe." George Orwell, always a penetrating observer of the *trahison des clercs*, at once noted how "all the appeasers, e.g. Professor E. H. Carr, have switched their allegiance from Hitler to Stalin."

What ever was the mechanism of self-deception at work whereby this undoubtedly clever and industrious man could blot out reality? In 1937, the worst of the years of terror, he visited Moscow again. In the street he happened to meet the former Prince Mirsky, a literary critic and an émigré who had made the mistake of leaving London to return to Moscow. In his memoirs, Malcolm Muggeridge has described how the rather pitiful Mirsky used at the time to come round to his apartment for a bath, and then assert that "what was happening in the USSR had to happen." Unauthorized contact with a foreigner carried a death sentence, but Carr insisted on a conversation with Mirsky even though the latter pretended not to recognize him. Later that year, Mirsky was arrested and liquidated. Muggeridge says that Mirsky's crime was an untimely critique of Pushkin, but Carr's greeting can only have helped to build a case against him.

Such an episode brings into focus the lack of imagination, the tunnel vision, and the conceit that together permitted Carr to censor facts without acknowledging to himself that he was doing so. In Haslam's words, he "may have had his suspicions" about the massacre of the Polish officers and intellectuals at Katyn, but he "suspended" them. Breaking off relations with Moscow

in the aftermath of this most cold-blooded of crimes, the Poles, he judged, were “hasty and ill-advised.” It was understandable that the Red Army should allow the Germans to suppress the Warsaw uprising of 1944. Russia, he wrote at the end of that same year, “has no aggressive or expansive designs in Europe.” Communist governments imposed by Stalin in the satellites of eastern Europe ought to be recognized. The Communists had both the right and the authority to take over Greece. By accepting the division of the world into conflicting blocs, Churchill’s famous “Iron Curtain” speech in 1946 impeded in the West “the proper development of economic planning and of social aims.” The Soviet suppression of uprisings in Hungary and Czechoslovakia hardly ruffled him. Soviet force and terror were automatically equated with red-baiting and McCarthyism in America.

After Aberystwyth, he moved to Oxford, and then to Trinity College, Cambridge, in the heart of the establishment. His rooms were in one of that college’s most historic quadrangles. A bust of Lenin occupied a shelf of the bookcase. While maintaining that capitalism was dead, he was constantly on the telephone to his stockbroker. His letters beseeching for funds and grants from the Rockefeller Foundation or university sponsors refer to his need to be comfortable. It was a case of collectivist equality for others and privilege for himself.

Useful idiot as he appeared to be, it would still be worthwhile to look up his KGB dossier. Carr was what the trade calls “an agent of influence,” promoting the party line either of his own free will or perhaps prompted by the Soviet officials with whom he was in touch in London and Moscow and elsewhere. In early Cold War days, for instance, Carr lectured in Vienna, going out of his way to stay for the purpose with Peter Smollett, well-known as a Soviet apologist. Haslam notes this, but does not go on to explain that Smollett had a deeper role, having been recruited into the KGB by Kim Philby himself and acquiring the code name *Abo*.

Throughout the second half of his life, Carr was at work on the many volumes of his *History of the Soviet Union*. He believed himself to be sculpting in marble the superiority of the Soviet Union, and the inevitability of its triumph worldwide. These books part company with reality. In the manner of the Webbs before him, in the manner of a Foreign Office drudge as well, he took the Soviet paper deposit at face value, quoting the resolutions of this plenum and the directives of that party congress as if this was all there was to the society. The indifference to the murdered millions is astounding. “I suppose I’ve rather by-passed the horrors,” was Carr’s typical euphemism for his inhumanity, as expressed in a letter to Betty Behrens, herself a Cambridge don. Equally astounding, he continued, “But then I’m a historian.”

Another question at once arises: how was it possible that Carr was considered an authority on Soviet developments and that editors and publishers turned to him reflexively for his opinion? Haslam’s answer, in part anyhow, is that Carr may not have told the truth but that he lied quite beautifully. Haslam speaks of the smooth elegance of Carr’s prose, the extraordinary verbal dexterity, the confident sweep of his judgments, “one of the most acute minds of his generation” (though so acutely wrong)—every few pages he heaps up confusing literary compliments of the kind. This is the biographer’s special pleading. Carr pumped out leader-writer’s boiler-plate: “sharply distinguished,” “peculiar difficulties,” “remarkable intellect,” “striking reversal,” “rejected firmly,” “disagreeable truth,” “grievous error”—his pages are a procession of clichés.

Carr’s relationship with Isaac Deutscher was crucial. A similar character, every bit as intolerant and self-satisfied, a totalitarian of Trotskyist hue, Deutscher exploited his continental and rather conspiratorial background to persuade people that he really knew about the Soviet Union. There is a little ditty about two celebrated historians in a previous century: “Ladling from alternate tubs, Stubbs butters Freeman, Freeman but-

ters Stubbs." In repetitious columns and reviews, Carr and Deutscher duly buttered one another as the only commentators able to interpret events.

Singly or together, they simultaneously denigrated everyone who disagreed with their views. Hugh Seton-Watson, Edward Crankshaw, George Katkov, David Footman, and his own former pupil Norman Stone were among the many colleagues against whom Carr intrigued or whom he openly criticized, in the hope of destroying them and their professional reputation. Isaiah Berlin, the most polite and unpolemical of men, published a rebuttal of Carr's *What is History?*, an essay which makes a frivolous, almost childish, case against the individual's freedom of choice and in favor of a quasi-Marxist historical determinism. An unforgiving Carr lost no chance afterwards to jibe at Berlin. Leonard Schapiro was probably the most distinguished British Sovietologist of the day. As chairman of a publications subcommittee at Chatham House, Carr did his best—with dispiriting success—to suppress what eventually became one of Schapiro's best books: *The Origin of Communist Autocracy* (1955), a classic ever since.

These men could look after themselves; Carr's wives could not. Enclosed in his ego, he paid no attention to any of them, discarding them like tissues, resenting any interruption to his work, loathing Christmas because libraries were closed, loathing opera, loathing parties and social occasions. The nastiness was unlimited. Anne developed a sarcoma, and, on the day that one of her daughters was due to have a very serious operation, Carr informed her that the marriage was over, that he was leaving her for Joyce. In due course he left Joyce for her closest friend, Betty Behrens. She was an expert on eighteenth-century France, but Carr never read what she had written. Soon Betty had a nervous collapse and moved to an asylum, whereupon Carr tried to take some of her considerable fortune.

Events have stranded Carr; he labored his life away under false assumptions. The cen-

tral figure of slapstick is someone who mistakes his illusions for reality. In that respect, Carr cuts an irresistibly comic figure, and will do so for as long as anyone remembers him. Things might have turned out otherwise, however, and in that case here was someone who would have had no trouble at all signing death warrants in a police state. The bully and the misanthrope gravitate naturally to totalitarianism. The lesson is gratifyingly simple.

Terminal self-pity

Frank McCourt 'Tis: A Memoir.
Scribner, 367 pages, \$26

reviewed by Brooke Allen

Frank McCourt opened his wildly successful memoir *Angela's Ashes* with a passage that served as a sort of ironic disclaimer for the tale he was about to unfold:

People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred years.

And that is as good a description as any of the three-hundred-and-fifty pages that follow, right smack in the tradition of Sean O'Casey's warts-and-all autobiography. The only item on this list that doesn't show up in *Angela's Ashes* is the pompous priests; in fact the priests young Frank comes in contact with tend to be rather humane. They are made up for, though, by the hysterical religiosity of the Limerick citizenry as McCourt presents it. His grandmother, for instance, insists that God has to be hard, "otherwise you'd have all kinds of babies clamorin' to get into heaven, Protestants an' everything, an' why should they get in after what they did to us for eight hundred

years?" The teacher who prepares young Frank and his schoolfellows for their First Communion is just as bad:

Talking about First Communion makes the master all excited. He paces back and forth, waves his stick, tells us we must never forget that the moment the Holy Communion is placed on our tongues we become members of that most glorious congregation, the One, Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church, that for two thousand years men, women and children have died for the Faith, that the Irish have nothing to be ashamed of in the martyr department. Haven't we provided martyrs galore? Haven't we bared our necks to the Protestant ax? Haven't we mounted the scaffold, singing, as if embarking on a picnic, haven't we, boys?

Angela's Ashes, published when McCourt was sixty-five, nearly half a long century after he left Limerick, was born from one emotion and one only: rage. That rage was so powerful, so sore, and so immediate that by main force it lifted an amateurish and not very skillful writer into the ranks of the literary elite—for a few years, anyway. It is rage in the real Irish tradition of Swift and Shaw, although McCourt lacks the wit, erudition, and detachment necessary to deepen that rage and make it mean something lasting.

McCourt claims intermittently through *Angela's Ashes* and its sequel, *Tis*, to feel love for his parents, Angela and Malachy, but if it is love it is of an oblique sort, more a sadness at the lack of love than love itself. More obvious than his love, and more overt, is his hatred. Here is his parents' first meeting, at a Brooklyn party at the outset of the Great Depression: "With Angela drawn to the hangdog look and Malachy lonely after three months in jail, there was bound to be a knee-trembler." A knee-trembler is the sexual act performed up against a wall; the result of this particular knee-trembler was the infant Frank, and a marriage that was to bring nothing but misery to the

wretched couple. McCourt's tone in discussing all this, as the knee-trembler remark indicates, is almost pure snideness. Many a reader will find the snideness entirely appropriate; still, as a literary device it gets tired, and it is not, finally, sufficient.

Malachy McCourt (senior, that is; Frank's brother and occasional collaborator is also named Malachy) is such a classic Irish drunk that one wonders whether his son isn't in fact laying it on a little too thick. His drinking and shiftlessness mess things up for him and his young family in America and cause them to leave New York and try their luck back in Ireland—a disastrous move, as it turns out. In Limerick he drinks up the dole every week and drinks up his paycheck, too, on the exceedingly rare occasions that he bestirs himself to earn one. He is suspected of selling the body of his dead daughter and drinking the proceeds. He drinks while arranging the funeral of Frank's baby brother, leaving brown Guinness stains on the little white coffin. He drinks while his children and wife starve. With the outbreak of the Second World War he departs for England, like so many other Irishmen, to earn big money in the munitions factories, but he drinks up that easy cash too, and from that time on is effectively separated from the family.

It's not enough that he's a hopeless alcoholic, for we might be able to drum up some sympathy for that affliction. He is also a sentimental slob, drunkenly teaching his little sons patriotic Irish songs and making them swear to die for the martyred motherland. And he's a snob, too fine to pick up bits of coal in the road even if his family is perishing from the cold, or to carry parcels in the street: "he never carries anything, parcels, bags, packages. If you carry such things you lose your dignity."

In short he's the stage Irishman at his very worst, and the martyred Angela, who puts up with him for so many years, is nearly as infuriating, in spite of the fact that she contrives, admirably, to keep her family together. Why does she let her husband get his hands on any money at all? Why doesn't

she kick him out for good?—for as hard as it might be to support her family on her own, it would have to be easier without him. Why does she keep expecting him to reform? Why doesn't she herself look for a job—any job, however menial?

Frank McCourt is still furious at his parents, with good reason, and his fury at them is part of and entirely wrapped up in his disgust with the culture that helped to form them, the prewar slum culture of Catholic Ireland. Now that Limerick, a mere sixty years on, has become one of the hippest and most prosperous spots on the planet, McCourt's scenes of not-so-long-ago poverty and ruinous labor, straight out of *Germinal* or *Sons and Lovers*, seem quite incredible. Socially, too, it was—if McCourt is to be believed, and not all of his compatriots think that he is—a stupefyingly ignorant society, xenophobic and suspicious.

Dad doesn't talk to anyone in Mam's family and they don't talk to him because he's from the North and he has the odd manner. No one talks to Uncle Tom's wife, Jane, because she's from Galway and she has the look of a Spaniard. . . . People in families in the lanes of Limerick have their ways of not talking to each other and it takes years of practice. . . . You can always tell when people are not talking by the way they pass each other. The women hoist their noses, tighten their mouths and turn their faces away.

Narrow focus on the wrongs perpetrated by the English has paralyzed industry and confidence. The cult of masculinity, centered on drinking, destroys the social fabric. (In a grotesque travesty of a coming-of-age rite, boys are taken on their sixteenth birthday to the pub for their first pint.) McCourt's deep contempt for the entire male population of Ireland is always on the simmer:

In fine weather men sit outside smoking their cigarettes if they have them, looking at the world and watching us play. Women stand with their arms folded, chatting. They don't sit because all they do is stay home, take care

of the children, clean the house and cook a bit and the men need the chairs. The men sit because they're worn out from walking to the Labour Exchange every morning to sign up for the dole, discussing the world's problems and wondering what to do with the rest of the day.

Angela's Ashes is written on one note, a sustained note of almost hysterical anger that carries the narrative along briskly enough. But when McCourt continues his story with *'Tis*, that note is no longer appropriate or adequate. *'Tis* tells of McCourt's emigration to the United States at the age of nineteen, his misadventures in New York and elsewhere, his education at New York University, his early years as a teacher, and his failed first marriage. It is a diffuse story that demands a certain amount of introspection that the author, whether because he won't or can't, doesn't provide. The rage is still there, but this time we don't really understand its genesis. Is it because America isn't all he dreamed it would be? In that case, so what? Is it because the country didn't greet the young man with wide open arms and shower him with riches? Well, did he really expect it to?

McCourt had a few setbacks in his early years; life can never be easy for a new immigrant, even in booming postwar America. But looked at objectively his progress seems to have been pretty smooth. He began with menial jobs, then, thanks to his American passport (he had been born in the United States), joined the military, serving for a short stint in Germany. This entitled him to take advantage of the GI Bill. He had never attended high school, but he was lucky enough to come across a generous and broad-minded administrator at New York University who allowed him to matriculate there, on the sole condition that he maintain a B average for the first year—not exactly a bum deal. Not only that but the prettiest girl in his class, Alberta (called Mike) Small, the blonde Episcopalian girlfriend of a football star, found the young Irishman (despite the rotten teeth and

chronically infected eyes that made him so self-conscious) attractive enough to date, sleep with, and finally marry.

But in spite of this run of what most people would call good luck—or at any rate hard work rewarded—McCourt tells his story as one long litany of gripes. He hates his first job in New York, sweeping and emptying ashtrays at the Palm Court in the Biltmore Hotel; hates, especially, the ignominy of having to clean up after rich college boys who scatter cigarette ash as they chat about Hemingway and Camus with their dates. He joins the army and hates it, hates being made a dog trainer in the canine corps. Three weeks later, he is angry to be *separated* from his dog and made a clerk. Stateside again, he doesn't like his new job in a warehouse. Once at NYU he resents the lowly status of the education school, his own choice, and wishes he were studying something a little more glamorous. Even the WASP goddess is a disappointment: she likes to spend her weekends antiques, doing laundry, and engaging in other bourgeois activities; she even has the nerve to chew Frank out when he goes boozing with the lads and doesn't come home to dinner until two in the morning. McCourt, in short, is terminally pissed off.

I drank my beer and wondered what kind of a country is this where cops keep telling you to move on, where people put pigeonshit in your ham sandwich, where a girl who's engaged to be engaged to a football player walks away from me because I'm not wearing a tie. . . where college students eat and drink to their hearts content and moan about existentialism and the emptiness of everything, and cops tell you once again, Move on.

What kind of a country? Any and every kind of a country, unfortunately. It's not so much America he doesn't like, or Ireland either for that matter, but the manifold injustices of life itself. If *Angela's Ashes* was fueled by anger, *'Tis* is driven by mere self-pity, a fatally unattractive attitude and a pathetic basis for autobiography. To make it worse

McCourt has no distance on his youthful envy and resentments; he is still, it seems, completely in their thrall.

Geraniums have no fragrance, they live forever and the taste makes you sick though I'm sure there are people over there on Park Avenue who would take me aside and spend an hour persuading me of the glories of the geranium and I suppose I'd have to agree with them because everywhere I go people know more about everything than I do and it's not likely you'd be rich and living on Park Avenue unless you had a profound knowledge of geraniums and growing things in general.

The vast majority of *'Tis* is in this vein, with its whining, its faux-naïf pose, the breathless run-on sentences used to the exclusion of almost every other stylistic device. There are a few nice moments in the book: McCourt deals well with the old age and death of the impossible Angela, and some of his teaching experiences are both interesting and moving. But *'Tis* does not hold together; the life it describes is not especially interesting, nor is it recounted with much insight or intelligence. In fact, the reader has to wonder just why McCourt considered the tale worth the telling—aside, of course, from the fat advance he was no doubt offered on the strength of *Angela's Ashes*. By the end of *'Tis*, one is in heartfelt sympathy with the long-suffering Mike (by that time Mrs. McCourt) who, fed up with her husband's everlasting bellyaching, finally asks him what the hell he would do with himself if he weren't Irish. What, indeed?

A humane despot

Fenton Bresler Napoleon III: A Life.
Carroll & Graf, 300 pages, \$27.50

reviewed by Stuart Ferguson

Being a fan of Napoleon III can be frustrating. Friends and relatives confuse the glorious victor of Marengo, the Pyramids,

and Austerlitz with his nephew who was sickened by the sight of blood at the battles of Solferino and Magenta in 1859. They confuse the vendor of Louisiana for the instigator of the Mexican adventure. "Their" Napoleon wanted to invade England from the French port of Boulogne; "your" Napoleon actually invaded Boulogne from England. The prints and books and portraits of the first Napoleon given to you as presents collect dust on upper shelves, while your prized miniature bust of Napoleon III elicits the surprised remark, "I didn't know you were a Stalinist!"

Fenton Bresler's *Napoleon III: A Life* should help clear up some of the confusion. The subtitle is accurate; this is most definitely a book concerned with the personal life of the last monarch of France, while "his times" are related only incidentally. Colorful events, like the emperor's masterminding of the quixotic Mexican empire of Maximilian and Carlotta, get a few pages; parliamentary elections and the like get only a few lines. As Bresler writes, "this book's primary aim is to present a fascinating man, in all his fullness, to a modern audience." Accordingly, he concentrates on "the human side" of Napoleon III, relegating events in Europe to the background.

An English lawyer and author of books about Georges Simenon, Lord Goddard, and international crime, Bresler says that he treated this book as a work of investigation. He compares himself to a barrister preparing a case: "by the time he rises to his feet in front of the judge, [an author] has made himself an expert on the subject, sometimes more so than the so-called 'expert witnesses' who are to give evidence and who are to be cross-examined." Bresler also says that this is the book he always wanted to write; so we get not just the personal Napoleon III, but the personal biographer, too. He has visited all the sites where Louis Napoleon ever spent any time, dodging into traffic to get that perfect photograph of the secret garden door at the Elysée palace, through which the prince-president would sneak out to visit his mistress. Bresler paints a portrait of

a man who, once he had fulfilled his destiny of acceding to the imperial throne, was at a loss as to what to do next.

Is Napoleon III worth all this attention? Yes, even though Karl Marx and Victor Hugo both mocked him for not being his more famous uncle. (It was of Louis Napoleon that Marx memorably wrote that history repeats itself "the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.") The great English essayist Walter Bagehot had a more accurate appreciation of the lesser Napoleon's complex nature. In 1863, Bagehot described the emperor as possessing "a restless, scheming, brooding, *cavernous* mind; daring in idea—hesitating when it comes to action; a singular mixture of tenacity and inconsistency" who nonetheless was "unusually farseeing," thoroughly understanding "his nation, his day, and his position."

Napoleon III was certainly a despot, but, as Bresler says, he was a despot tinged with humanity. He ruled one of the great powers, first as president, then emperor, for more than twenty years, in a crucial period of the nineteenth century. During his reign, France fully embraced the industrial revolution; played an important role in the affairs of Asia, Africa, and America; and was arguably the arbiter of European diplomacy. A man of great charm, the emperor both inspired and exemplified unwavering loyalty. Although many of his chosen companions were *louche* in the extreme, he never abandoned them nor they him. His sudden rise was financed by his remarkable and long-suffering mistress, Harriet Howard; his government ministers were illegitimate relatives; one of his legitimate cousins was the court procurer.

Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's early life was picaresque. Born in 1808, he was raised in exile by his mother Hortense, daughter of the empress Josephine and wife of Napoleon I's brother Louis, the puppet king of Holland. Louis Napoleon grew up in Switzerland and Rome, dividing his time between learning how to ride and shoot and chasing anything in skirts. Farm maids, his

mother's aristocratic neighbors, girls he passed in the street—the young prince was interested in them all. In 1830 he and his brother took part in an unsuccessful rebellion against the pope, and had to flee the Papal States. En route his brother died of measles, and he himself came down with the disease. Hortense bravely nursed her remaining child and helped him escape to England. The death in 1832 of the Duke of Reichstadt—Napoleon I's sole legitimate son—meant that Louis Napoleon became the de facto Bonapartist pretender to the French throne. Neither his father nor any other of Napoleon's other surviving brothers were interested in risking their comfortable retirements in a reckless attempt to overthrow the current king of France, Louis Philippe.

Prince Louis made two daring efforts at capturing the French throne: at Strasbourg in 1836 and Boulogne in 1840. After the first he was quietly exiled to the United States. After the second he was condemned to "perpetual imprisonment" at the fortress of Ham, in northern France. When the sentence was read out the defendant politely inquired if anything in France was truly "perpetual." And indeed in 1846 he again escaped to England. But six years in a cold, damp prison had taught him that the wise man waits on events, and, by skillfully maneuvering during the tumultuous revolutionary year of 1848, Louis got himself elected president of the French Second Republic. In 1851, before his term expired, he staged a successful coup, giving himself dictatorial powers and another ten years as president. A year later the senate (he had appointed every member) passed a resolution imploring Louis to become emperor. He accepted, and the people of France, voting in a plebiscite, overwhelmingly confirmed the title.

It is possible to hold that during the Second Empire France was either distracted and stifled for twenty years, or given two precious decades of stability. What is certain is that Napoleon III moved France from the

New from Transaction

Against the Idols of the Age **David Stove**

**Edited and with an introduction by
Roger Kimball**

0-7658-0000-4 (cloth) 1999 345 pp \$39.95/£29.95

"Stove is an independent and honest philosopher who, like Voltaire and Nietzsche, has the wit to make us laugh as we learn."

—John Silber, chancellor, Boston University

"In a culture of iconoclastic posturing, David Stove is the true iconoclast. He is outrageously wrong about some things, but putting up with that is a price worth paying for his formidable, and frequently funny, contributions to—in the words of the great Dr. Johnson—clearing the mind of cant."

—Richard John Neuhaus, editor in chief,
First Things

A deadly serious (and hilariously funny) enemy of intellectual cant and the higher pretensions, Stove wrote to kill. Many thanks to Roger Kimball for making these brilliant essays available in America."

—Owen Harries, editor, *The National Interest*

"David Stove is thoughtful, trenchant, sharp, and wonderfully disrespectful of the established pieties of our time."

—Harvey C. Mansfield, Harvard University

**Online Orders
Receive 25% Discount***
www.transactionpub.com

*Individual credit card orders only.



transaction

RUTGERS—THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

DEPT. 99ADS, 35 BERRUE CIRCLE

PISCATAWAY, NEW JERSEY 08854

IN THE UK: 3 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN

LONDON WC2E 8LU

TEL: +44 (0)20 7 240 0856 OR FAX: +44 (0)20 7 379 0609

second rank of countries (where it had been since 1815 and Waterloo) to the first. He then saw it crushed and dismembered by the unified Germany he had unwittingly abetted. The emperor was critical in unifying Italy, whose armies would have been overwhelmed by Austria without his aid. But in the end he was remembered only for propping up the pope in his rump state of Rome. With his prefect of Paris, Baron Haussmann, the emperor remade the metropolis, turning it into a city of light—the glittering artistic and sensual capital of Europe. In 1870 Bismarck maneuvered France into war with Prussia. The Prussians crushed the French at Sedan where 100,000 French soldiers and Napoleon III himself were captured. The emperor was deposed by a provisional government in Paris, but the city was besieged and bombarded by the Germans, its inhabitants starved into surrender. Napoleon III's denouement was not grand. He, his empress Eugénie, and their son ended up in exile at Camden Place, a small country house outside London.

Among the more controversial ideas that Bresler advances is the suggestion that Jean Fialin, the self-styled Comte de Persigny, was not only the future emperor's earliest true adherent, but also possibly his lover. Bresler says that today

it would be fashionable to question if there was a homosexual link between them. If so, no evidence of it remains but it is not impossible to conjecture that someone so highly sexually charged as Louis with regard to women would also be capable of feeling sexual attraction for a man.

Well, "not impossible" covers a vast multitude of contingencies, improbable as well as probable.

It is when discussing the emperor's final

illness that Bresler comes into his own. His descriptions of Napoleon's ailments are perhaps overly graphic but nonetheless fascinating. For years Napoleon had suffered from gallstones (probably caused by a gonorrheal infection brought on by his dissolute habits). The pain came sporadically, but was, according to Bresler, most likely increased by stress. So Napoleon became incapacitated at moments of crisis when his full attention was most necessary. During his last campaign the emperor found it almost unbearable to sit on a horse, but insisted on it when with his troops.

Received wisdom has been that when Napoleon III died on January 9, 1873, it was despite a series of dangerous but necessary medical operations for the removal of a gallstone. Bresler has called on various medical authorities to review the case, including "the doyen of modern British urinological consultants, Sir David Innes Williams." Dr. Williams and his colleagues have convinced Bresler that Napoleon's English doctors (including Queen Victoria's personal physician) rushed to operate too soon after earlier exploratory procedures and that the resulting septicemia did him in. What was the rush? Louis thought the time was ripe for his return, but that it was absolutely necessary that he lead the movement from horseback. When the first operation was unsuccessful, the doctors kept trying until they killed him.

The very fatalistic Louis always assumed it might end badly. He had secretly acquired Camden Place years before his abdication. And one day, while still inhabiting the Tuileries, he lifted his young son and heir from his lap and watched him run off to play; turning to Prosper Mérimée (the author of *Carmen*), the emperor wondered aloud, "Will he ever reign?"

At the point of extinction

by Paul Dean

August is the silliest month, Eliot might have said. In the absence of hard news when the British Government goes on holiday, the media have even more column-inches than usual to spare for trivia. Around the middle of the month, the results of the Advanced Level Examinations (the university entrance qualification generally known as A-levels) are published, and there is an annual non-debate about whether it is easier to do well in than it used to be. The invariable conclusion of pundits is that, in a sacrosanct phrase, "standards have fallen." For instance, writing in the London *Independent* of August 19, the day the results came out, columnist Judith Judd commented: "Traditional subjects are in decline, while vocational subjects such as computing, media, and business are booming." In fact, that is statistically untrue; but more important is Judd's grotesque misuse of the word "vocational," which suggests that there is a black hole in the perception of the A-level and its purposes.

The A-level was designed, in 1951, for an educational system in which barely 10 per cent of eighteen year olds went to university, and has survived, with only minor structural modifications, into a time when that proportion has trebled. Major changes are in the offing, but at present students take three subjects intensively over two years—known as Lower and Upper Sixth Forms—with a coursework element (20 percent in English) having been introduced

in some subjects to balance the traditional written examination papers. The depth of specialization, applauded by some, scorned as too narrow by others, comes as a shock to those embarking on the course. A-level was meant to lead on from O-level (for "ordinary"), the academic examination taken at age sixteen. In 1988, O-level was replaced by the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education). This laughably easy examination has massively boosted entry to Sixth Forms, but while almost no children now leave school at sixteen, most find the demands of the A-level daunting. Hence a major aim of the proposed reforms is to bring the A-level more into line with GCSE, an ominous leveling-down move.

Whether "standards have fallen" remains, nonetheless, a question whose answer varies from subject to subject. In mathematics and the sciences, my colleagues insist they have plummeted, and that the first year of university study in those subjects frequently consists of an introductory course which either repeats much A-level work or covers topics which would once have been studied at school. In the humanities, the situation is less uniform. Since no literature is compulsory for GCSEs in modern languages, they are often studied at A-level with a minimal literature component, resulting in an over-emphasis on language as an instrument of social communication at the expense of intellectually challenging work. In history, there was uproar earlier this summer when

it appeared that all three A-level examination boards proposed to drop syllabi in earlier periods because they attracted so few candidates that they had ceased to be cost-effective. Eventually, one board agreed to retain its syllabus covering the period A.D. 300–1500, but warned that schools might have to pay extra to enter pupils for it.

In these cases it would seem that standards have indeed fallen, or at least, as many modernizers would concede, that the goalposts have been moved. Yet when I consider my own subject, things are not so straightforward. My A-level English Literature students tackle works from every period of English literature from Chaucer to the present day, in all the major genres: poetry, prose, and drama. They expect to study far more books than the eight about which they eventually write—perhaps twice as many. They determine their coursework in consultation with their teachers, and the eventual submission (one long essay on two texts or two shorter essays, each on a separate text) is the product of guided but independent research. This is vital in boosting their confidence and developing their powers of expression: it frequently converts a mediocre student into a good one. Nor do students opt for the easy or the obvious. Among recent pairings have been studies of disguise and deception in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Joe Orton's *Loot*, fantasy worlds in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books and in Irving Welsh's *Trainspotting*, social satire in the Capek brothers' *R.U.R.* and in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the urban symbolism of Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot, and remedial confession in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.

Who, reflecting on the range of historical, philosophical, and cultural expertise presupposed by such undertakings, could agree with those who sneer at the A-level as a “narrow” test of ability, and declare that “standards are falling”? Such work would have been beyond me at my pupils' age. Indeed, they must be among the best prepared in the country for university work,

having taken a course offering historical breadth, analytical depth, and independent learning. Yet the new syllabi, due to take effect from September 2000, may make such an achievement impossible.

While final details have yet to be agreed between the examination boards and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the government-appointed body which validates the boards' proposals, one innovation is certain: the division of the Sixth Form course into two distinct parts, an Advanced Subsidiary (AS) in five subjects and a higher-level course (A2) in three. Theoretically, both parts can be taken at the end of the two-year Sixth Form course, but strong pressure to adopt a modular system is being exerted upon schools, many of which will capitulate. The increase from three to five subjects of study, intended to broaden the curriculum, will in fact promote superficiality and cramming, since the total amount of teaching time for each subject will be reduced, destroying the freedom to read widely beyond the syllabus which has traditionally been a liberating feature of the Lower Sixth, and shackling pupils and teachers, from the outset, to a myopically functionalist view of A-level. Teachers' ability to work as they see fit will be curtailed. Coursework will remain, but titles must be approved by the board and fall within a range of prescribed topics. Proposals to retain questions on unseen passages—the proud tradition of practical criticism, which is probably the best test of a candidate's intellectual ability—were originally rejected by QCA on the grounds that no marking criteria could be written for unprepared material (shades of the Circumlocution Office!). In the latest drafts, this component remains, but whether it will survive is doubtful.

The current assessment objectives for the A-level, which are characterized by common sense and flexibility, have been rewritten at the behest of QCA so that they resemble those for GCSE. They enshrine fantastically unworkable shades of meaning, the brainchildren of bureaucrats with no under-

standing of how the human mind operates. For a grade A, candidates must “demonstrate a comprehensive, detailed knowledge and understanding of a wide range of literary texts from the past to the present”; for grade C, they must merely “demonstrate secure knowledge and understanding of a range of texts from different periods.” These are distinctions without differences. When does a range become wide? How can knowledge and understanding be secure if they are not also detailed and comprehensive? At what point do “different periods” magically turn into the span of time from “the past to the present”? In their written style, grade A candidates, decrees QCA, must be “fluent, well-structured, accurate and precise,” but grade C candidates can get away with just being “accurate and clear.” It is irresistible to point out that the QCA would hardly merit a grade C on its own criteria.

Nor must it be supposed that the examination boards welcome these changes. They agree with teachers that they are moonshine, but must pretend otherwise if they want to keep their license. The QCA and its political paymasters want the new

examinations because they will then have maximum control over something they both hate and fear: teachers’ and pupils’ freedom of thought. Education in England has been politicized to the point of extinction. A British education secretary is not a person interested in education, but a professional politician with a career to advance. Our university system has already been all but wrecked by remodeling on the American pattern, with results with which readers of *The New Criterion* will be painfully familiar, and now our school system is to be brought into line with a similar acme of mediocrity.

The aim of modern education is brutally instrumental, the fitting of tomorrow’s citizens to live in tomorrow’s world (and to cast their votes gratefully for those to whom they owe their enlightenment). The suggestion that there could be any nonutilitarian or nonquantifiable reason for acquiring an education is laughed to scorn as “idealistic,” “impractical,” or, worst of all, “elitist.” An academic concept of education is, well, academic—which is now a term of abuse in Britain.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion*:

God and the Victorians *by Roger Kimball*

Robert Musil’s diaries *by Eric Ormsby*

“Modern Starts” at MOMA *by Karen Wilkin*

Willa Cather’s “The Professor’s House” *by Donald Lyons*

Hazlitt & Wordsworth *by Martin Greenberg*

Translating Rilke *by John Simon*

Poems *by William Logan*

LITERAL *Latté*

PUTTING WORDS.....FIRST

*In its first year of publication (1994/1995), Literal Latté was honored with a Pushcart Prize for the winning story in The First Annual Literal Latté Fiction Awards Sponsored By Bass Ale. The story, *The Slaughterhouse*, by Karen Halvorsen Schreck, appeared in Vol 1, No 6

Literal Latté has also published stories, poems, essays & art by Ray Bradbury, Michael Brodsky, Robert Olen Butler, Stephen Dixon, Harlan Ellison, Allen Ginsberg, Daniel Harris, Phillip Lopate, Carole Maso, Nancy Milford, Carol Muske, Gloria Steinem, Frank Stella, John Updike, Jerry Uelsmann & many exciting new talents...

DON'T MISS A SINGLE DROP!

**A YEAR OF INCOMPARABLE
STIMULATION FOR LESS THAN
THE COST OF 2 MOVIE TICKETS!**

.....

SUBSCRIBE NOW — \$15 per year for 6 issues

Make checks payable to LITERAL LATTE

61 East 8th Street, Suite 240, NYC 10003 Tel: 212-260-5532

**"SERIOUS AND LIVELY,
SCHOLARLY AND POP-
ULAR, ECUMENICAL**



**AND PARTISAN...
THE CHESTERTON
REVIEW IS A REBUKE
TO THOSE WHO SUP-
POSE THAT SERIOUS
WRITING CANNOT BE
FUN TO READ OR
THAT AN ORTHODOX
VIEWPOINT MUST BE
A NARROW ONE."**

**~ ROBERT P. GEORGE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**

***"One of the best quarterly Reviews—
if not the best—currently in existence."***

~ BARBARA LUCAS WALL

The Chesterton Review

The journal of the G. K. Chesterton Institute

Subscribe now and save up to 30% off the ordinary subscription rate.
Plus this Special Offer for new subscribers: for each \$38.00 subscription to our quarterly, the new subscriber will also receive a free copy of one or more of the following special issues (c. 300 pages):

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ 20th Anniversary | ☐ David Jones |
| ☐ C.S. Lewis | ☐ Vincent McNabb |
| <i>or two of our regular special issues (144+ pages each)</i> | |
| ☐ Karl Kraus & Aurel Kolnai | ☐ Christopher Dawson |
| ☐ Japanese Christian Writers | ☐ Charles Dickens |
| ☐ New Chesterton Manuscript | ☐ George Grant |
| ☐ Uncollected Father Brown Story | ☐ Cardinal Manning |
| ☐ Chesterton's Schooldays | ☐ Father Brown |

Or the book:

- ☐ Chesterton and the Modernist Crisis

Please enter my membership to the *Chesterton Review* for one/two years at \$38.00 per year.

- ☐ One year (\$38.00) ☐ Two years (\$70.00)

Name

Address

City State Zip Code

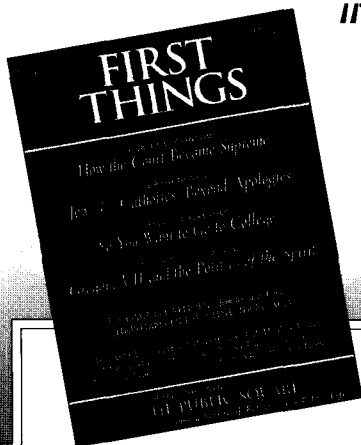
Charge to VISA or Mastercard

Expiry date

Make cheque payable to: Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI)
P.O. Box 4431, Wilmington, DE 19807. You can also order the
Review with a Visa or Mastercard by calling 1-800-526-7022
or by e-mail inquiries at isi@isi.org.

*The Chesterton Review is the journal of the G. K. Chesterton Institute,
301 Allen Avenue, P.O. Box 802, Meriden, CT*

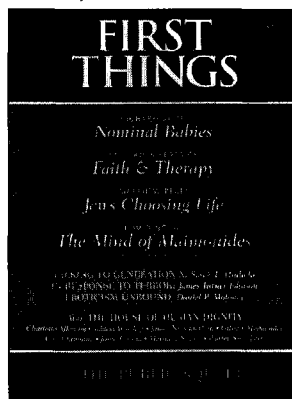
TCR1597



"The spiritual nerve center of the new conservatism..."

— The New York Times Magazine

edited by Richard John Neuhaus



Discover a journal that gives you a fresh and refreshing look at today's most important religious and moral questions.

From abortion to post-modernism, **FIRST THINGS** engages you in a lively and profound conversation about the ordering of public life.

You are invited to join that conversation by trying **FIRST THINGS** on a money-saving, trial basis. To order, simply return the coupon below.

"Everyone talks about the proper role of religion in public affairs, but **FIRST THINGS** is the only place in which a serious and illuminating exploration of that question can be pursued..."

—Norman Podhoretz

Try 12 issues of **FIRST THINGS** RISK FREE

6NC499

☐ **YES!** I'd like to try this sprightly, outspoken source of ideas and insight on religion and society. Please enter my 12-issue subscription (one year, plus two bonus issues) for only \$19.95 – more than \$25 off the newsstand price.

NO RISK, FULLY GUARANTEED. If I am not absolutely delighted with my **FIRST THINGS** subscription, I'll receive a full, prompt refund on all unmailed copies.

Name

☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Bill me

Address

Charge my ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

City/State/Zip

Card #

FIRST THINGS · P.O. Box 3000 · Denville, NJ 07834

Exp. date

THE BOSTON BOOK REVIEW

<http://www.BostonBookReview.com>

The Best of Both Worlds



The Apollonian



The Bostonian



The Dionysian

The thinking person's literary arts magazine with fiction, poetry, interviews, essays and book reviews.

Subscribe to the **BOSTON BOOK REVIEW**.
Discover the well-written.

In addition, sign up to receive our **FREE** bimonthly email Gazette for info about authors, new articles and reviews, BBR bestsellers and best picks, occasional short reviews, and more. Send an email with **subscribe** in the subject line to Gazette@soapbox.BostonBookReview.com.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

1 yr. (10 issues) \$24.00

Canada and International add \$16.00

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Credit Card Payments: (or call 617 497-0344)

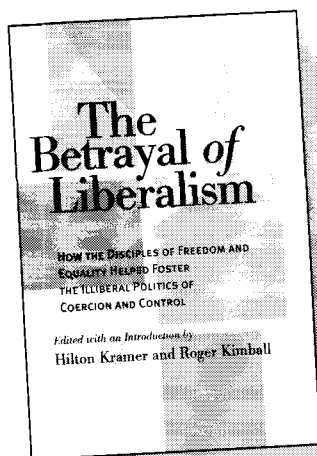
No. _____ Exp. date: _____

Signature: _____

☐ VISA ☐ MC ☐ DISC ☐ AMEX

Or send check to:

THE BOSTON BOOK REVIEW
30 Brattle Street, 4th floor
Cambridge, MA 02138



What liberalism means and what it stands for now

The Betrayal of Liberalism

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
HILTON KRAMER AND ROGER KIMBALL

In these incisive essays which first appeared in the *New Criterion*, ten distinguished critics and observers examine the origins and prospects of liberalism, from its roots in thinkers such as Rousseau and Mill to its troubled legacy in 20th-century pursuits, and its compromising effects in the moral and intellectual life of our culture.

Just published in hardcover and paperback



Ivan R. Dee, Publisher

Chicago • A Member of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group

At your bookseller, or order toll-free 1-800-462-6420 with a major credit card.

The Jacksonian Tradition

Walter Russell Mead

Conservatism and Foreign Policy

Samuel Huntington, James Kitfield, Gideon Rose

Anatol Lieven: The (Not So) Great Game

Alexander Rose: The Ordeal of Kashmir

Owen Harries: A Year of Debating China

Humanitarian Intervention

Edward Luttwak

on

Kofi's Africa

Donald Emmerson

on

East Timor

Francis Fukuyama on Daniel Bell

Andrew Bacevich on Three Kings

Peter Rutland on The Black Book

Did Western Civilization Survive the 20th Century?

Alan Charles Kors

And much more.

www.nationalinterest.org

THE NATIONAL INTEREST • P.O. Box 622 • Shrub Oak, NY 10588-0622 • (800) 893-8944 • (914) 962-6297

NC1299

Charles Arnoldi

December 4, 1999 – January 15, 2000

Charles Cowles Gallery

INTERIM LOCATION

74 Grand Street Soho New York 10013

Tel (212) 925-3500 Fax (212) 925-3501

info@cowlesgallery.com

The New Criterion
850 Seventh Avenue
Suite 400
New York NY 10019

Periodicals Postage
Paid at New York, NY
and at additional
Mailing Offices